


الواق





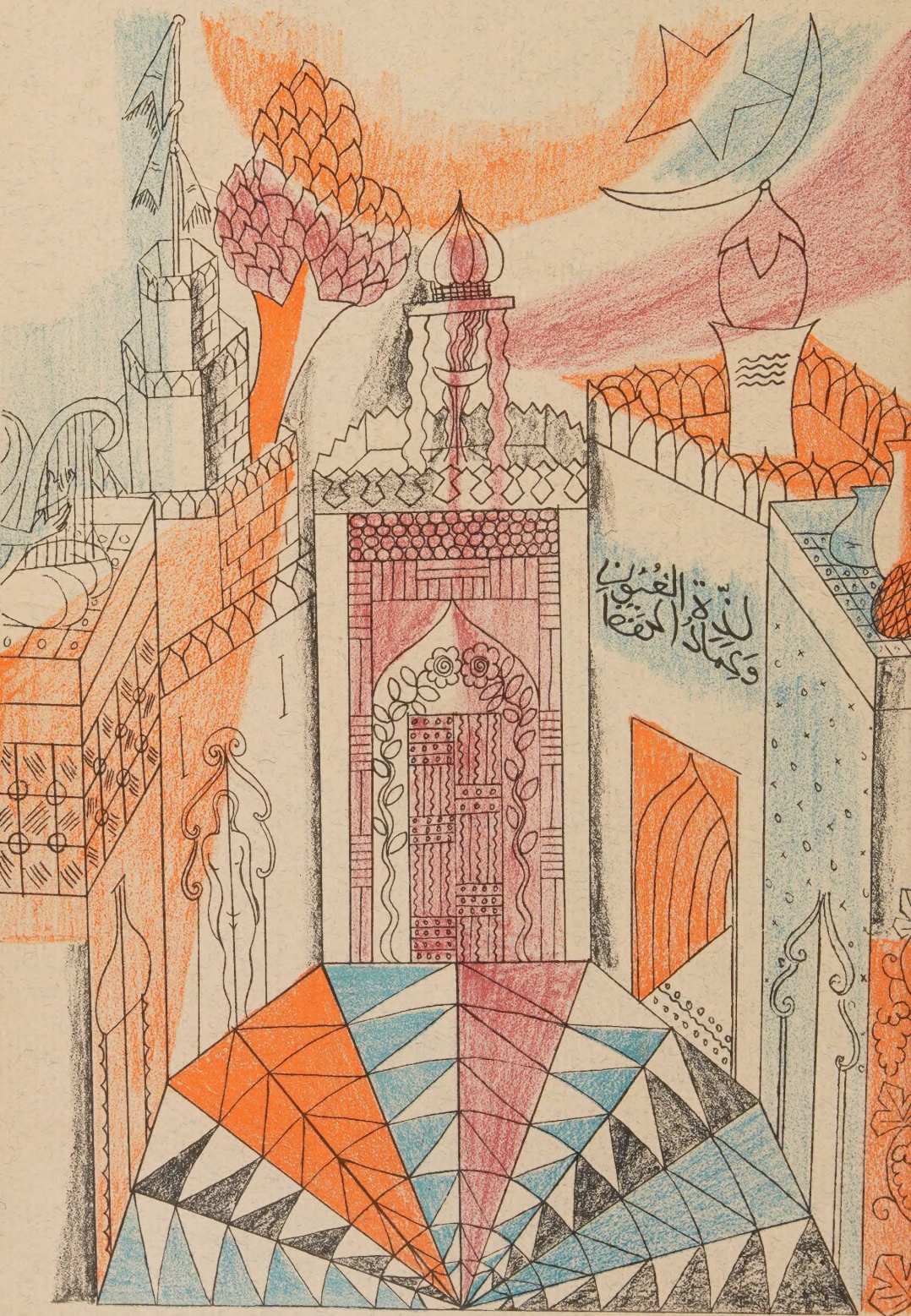
(Bifrost)

12/10/10



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/vathek0000will_t6g0



لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ

VATHEK

BY WILLIAM BECKFORD

A NEW TRANSLATION BY HERBERT B. GRIMSDITCH



WITH TEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARION V. DORN

THE NONESUCH PRESS

16 GREAT JAMES STREET, BLOOMSBURY. 1929

PRINTED AND MADE IN ENGLAND



FRONTISPIECE AND TITLE PAGE DESIGN

THE INTRODUCTION . . . I

THE TALE OF VATHEK . . . 13

A TEXTUAL NOTE . . . 170

ILLUSTRATIONS AT PP. . . 13

28 53 70 85 114 126 156



INTRODUCTION BY THE TRANSLATOR



THE bibliographical history of William Beckford's *Vathek* is extremely complicated, and the full discussion of it would occupy many pages. Since the purpose of this book is to provide a new version of the story itself rather than a detailed critical account of its nature, origin, and vicissitudes, these introductory remarks will be limited to a brief sketch of the composition and translation of *Vathek* and the facts which seem to make a new version desirable.¹

Some time before 1782 Beckford had made the acquaintance of the Rev. Samuel Henley, then a master at Harrow, and a capable Oriental scholar, who shared his admiration for the Eastern tale and inspired him to compose one himself. The story was begun at the end of January 1782, and after Beckford went abroad, in May of the same year, he corresponded with Henley, keeping him informed as to its progress. It was long believed, from a statement by Cyrus Redding in his *Memoirs of William Beckford*, that *Vathek* had been written at one sitting of three days and two nights; but whether this account arose out of a misstatement by Beckford to Redding or was an invention or misunderstanding of the bio-

¹ The student anxious for fuller information may obtain it in the edition of *Vathek* published with an introduction by Dr. Richard Garnett in 1893 (reprinted 1900); in Mr. Lewis Melville's *Life and Letters of William Beckford* (1910); and in the edition of *Vathek* (French, Paris text) issued by Stéphane Mallarmé in 1876 (reprinted 1893). But Mallarmé is here ill-informed and unreliable. The present writer hopes to treat the whole subject at length in another place.

grapher, it was definitely proved false in 1893, when Dr. Richard Garnett published extracts from a long correspondence between Beckford and Henley relating to the tale and its translation. This correspondence, which was published by courtesy of Mr. Alfred Morrison of Fonthill House, showed that *Vathek* was begun in January 1782 and finished some time before 13 January 1783. Some time before 18 November 1783 the manuscript had been handed to Henley for translation, but it was not until 19 October 1784 that Beckford was able to acknowledge the receipt of a portion of it in English. Meanwhile Beckford, no doubt taking the *Arabian Nights* as his model, was preparing several episodes or inset-stories which were to be related to the Caliph and his paramour by princes condemned to share their fate in the Hall of Eblis. Henley was strictly enjoined (particularly in a letter written from Vevey on 9 February 1786) on no account to publish his translation before the appearance of the original French; but towards the end of July in the same year he did this very thing, and made matters worse by issuing the book as a translation from an Arabic manuscript and suppressing Beckford's name.

Unless further information comes to light the exact motives for Henley's piratical action must remain obscure. His point of view may have been that he had spent a great deal of time and labour on the translation and a series of notes which he compiled, and that Beckford's delay in finishing and dispatching the promised *Episodes* induced a doubt as to whether they would ever be completed. Greatly saddened by the death of his wife at the end of May 1786, Beckford wrote on 1 August that he doubted his ability to finish the *Episodes* during the coming winter, but this letter certainly had no effect on Henley's decision to publish the English version, for he had actually done so just before it was written. Henley wrote to Beckford's solicitor on 23 October 1786 excusing

his action, but his explanations seem very vague and unsatisfactory. After quibbling over the word 'entrusted', so far as it concerns the manuscript, he bases his main excuse on the fact that Beckford's letter of 1 August, prohibiting publication without the *Episodes*, did not reach him till 18 August; but he says nothing of the equally emphatic prohibition which had been contained in the letter of 9 February. A further passage in Henley's explanation is rendered obscure by lacunae in the correspondence. It runs:

'... In consideration of a late unhappy occurrence it was my own wish to have intirely suppressed the work, but as I had been employed upon it prior to that event, and was known to be so by some of my friends, I could not decline it without favouring a charge that I was unwilling to countenance, and therefore sacrificed my own inclination to what I considered as a positive engagement to Mr. Beckford—not however without a precaution in the preface which, if the reviews of publick prints may be trusted, failed not to answer its aim. Before my papers went to press I wrote to apprise Mr. B. of it, and as soon as the volume was printed I forwarded to him a large paper copy. In so doing I considered myself as gratifying him in the highest degree. . . .'¹

Since the letter from Beckford's solicitor to which this is evidently a reply, and letters exchanged during August, September, and the early part of October, are lacking, the careful vagueness of the passage just quoted is extremely baffling. What was the 'unhappy occurrence'; and of what 'charge' was Henley afraid; and what 'precaution' did he take? The only 'unhappy occurrence' of which we know is the death of Lady Margaret Beckford, but there seems to be no reason why this should have caused Henley to wish to suppress the book. Assuming for the moment that this is his meaning, he may have thought, in view of Beckford's despondent state of mind, that the *Episodes* would be finally abandoned and the main story withdrawn, in which case all his labour would have been

¹ Melville, *Life and Letters of William Beckford*, pp. 137-9.

wasted. On this hypothesis the 'charge' to which he alludes may be one of incapacity to translate the work satisfactorily. But all these suppositions seem most unlikely on the face of it. A more plausible explanation (though it is pure guesswork) is that in view of Beckford's reputation as an eccentric,¹ statements had been spread that the book was immoral, and the 'unhappy occurrence' would be some definite accusation of this kind. The 'charge' would then be very obvious, and a very damaging one to the reputation of a clergyman. On either hypothesis the meaning of the 'precaution' is difficult to determine. It would seem to be Henley's statement that the work was from the Arabic, and his suppression of Beckford's name.

Beckford's next step was to issue the French text at Lausanne and Paris in 1787. There has been considerable discussion as to which of these editions came first, and both Dr. Garnett and Mr. Melville give priority to the Lausanne. This opinion would seem to be well founded, for the following reasons:

(a) Lausanne contains a preface by Beckford claiming his authorship, and has four notes only, on the meanings of Oriental words. Paris has no preface, but translates twenty-four pages of Henley's notes. The presence of a preface would seem to be consonant with a *first* issue, as an immediate counterblast to Henley's 'Arabic' falsehood: it might be omitted from a *second* issue either because it was no longer felt to be useful, or (though it is short and restrained in tone), because Beckford on second thoughts deemed it more dignified to suppress all allusion to the feud. By the same token he might naturally omit the notes from a *first* issue either

¹ This reputation was of course augmented in his later life, and especially during his residence at Fonthill; but even as a young man he was known to be highly unconventional—and hence a ready target for slander.

through pique or lack of time for printing, and print some of them in the second when there was no special haste and when perhaps the passage of time had somewhat modified his ire against their compiler.

(b) A note by a certain M. Chavannes, written on the title-page of a copy of the Lausanne edition sold in London on 29 March 1889, clearly states that he was commissioned by Beckford to correct the manuscript and have it printed at Lausanne, and that Beckford subsequently printed another edition in Paris, to the prejudice of the Lausanne edition.¹

(c) The Lausanne text is meanly printed on poor paper, with cramped margins, and is full of orthographical errors—all of which things might well be due to haste. The Paris, on the contrary, has none of these defects.²

(d) The two texts differ considerably; and the variant readings point to Paris as the *revised* edition, while the Lausanne corresponds more nearly with Henley's rendering.

(e) External evidence in the shape of Beckford's probable whereabouts when he heard of the English edition points strongly to Lausanne as the first place of printing. He was probably at Vevey, on the Lake of Geneva, only a few miles from Lausanne, which was the nearest town of any considerable size.

(f) The strongest piece of evidence is the number of narrators of *Episodes* indicated in the passage where they are supposed to relate their histories. In the Lausanne edition it is clear that there were to have been four *Episodes*, for the main story breaks in on the narration of the *quatrième prince* (for whom, however, Beckford

¹ Julian Marshall, in *Notes and Queries*, 20 April 1889, quoted by Garnett (1900 ed., p. xxvii).

² Examples of both are in the British Museum. I have carefully compared them.

had not yet even invented a name, since he is indicated only by dots); while in the Paris there are places for only three stories, and it is the *troisième prince* who is interrupted. In actual fact only three *Episodes* were written, and even the last of these was broken off abruptly and never finished. It is therefore clear that between the publication of the Lausanne edition and that of Paris Beckford had given up the idea of writing a fourth inset-story.

(g) The names of the princes and princesses are nearer to their final forms in the Paris edition than they are in the Lausanne. This is best shown in a table:

<i>Lausanne, 1787.</i>	<i>Paris, 1787.</i>	<i>London, 1815.</i>
Alasi & Jironz	Alasi & Firoux	Alasi et Firouz
Kalilah, Zulkais	Kalilah, Zulkais	Kalilah, Zulkais
Berkiarekh	Borkiarokh	Barkiarokh

Beckford evidently cherished the design of issuing an edition of *Vathek* with its *Episodes*, for an Advertisement for such an edition was discovered by Mr. Lewis Melville in the archives of Hamilton Palace.¹ But, probably because no publisher would pay the high price which Beckford demanded, this plan was never carried out, and when a third edition of the main story appeared in French in 1815 the *Episodes* were again omitted, though the preface contained Beckford's first known allusion in print to their existence. It ran thus:

‘Les éditions² de Paris et de Lausanne, étant devenue extrêmement rares, j’ai consenti enfin à ce que l’on republiât à Londres ce petit ouvrage tel que je l’ai composé.

La traduction, comme on sçait, a paru avant l’original; il est fort

¹ *The Episodes of Vathek*; translated by Sir Frank T. Marzials; introduction by Lewis Melville, pp. xxix–xxx (Stephen Swift, 1912).

² I give a literal transcript, without corrections.

aisé de croire que ce n'étoit pas mon intention—des circonstances, peu intéressantes pour le public, en ont été la cause.

J'ai préparé quelques Episodes; ils sont indiqués à la page 200, comme faisant suite a Vathek—peut-être paroîtront-ils un jour.

W. BECKFORD.'

1 Juin, 1815.

This edition is handsomely printed on good paper, with generous margins, and has a steel-engraved frontispiece by Isaac Taylor (after a drawing by Isaac Taylor, Junior) showing the Caliph and Nouronihar kneeling before the throne of Eblis. The title-page bears an engraving of Vathek's terrible eye, throwing out rays on all sides, and surmounted by a cockaded turban. The title-page runs: VATHEK / [Ornament] / A LONDRES; / CHEZ CLARKE, MOUNT STREET, / BERKELEY SQUARE., and it is curious that the author's name and the date are not here given, though they appear overleaf in the preface above transcribed.

Before publishing this edition Beckford had evidently made a thorough revision of his text, since a line-for-line comparison between it and the Paris version reveals a goodly number of variations. A large proportion of the emendations are merely verbal changes of slight importance, but others contribute in no small measure to the stylistic improvement of the tale. For example, a tendency towards an undue lusciousness and particularity in description, which defeats its own end by cloying the imagination, is corrected in the 1815 edition. This process runs parallel with Beckford's revision of his early work: *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, which he altered and shortened before issuing it as: *Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*. In the second book the sentimental romanticism of Beckford's early style is considerably toned down, to the great benefit of the work. It is to be noted that the Paris edition of *Vathek* was itself a drastic revision of the Lausanne

(the version used by Henley) and therefore the mere fact that no English rendering of the definitive edition of 1815 exists would seem to be a good reason for providing one.

But an additional reason is furnished by the shortcomings of Henley's treatment of the first French draft—defects which have been pointed out by various critics of note (such as Professor Oliver Elton, and Professor Saintsbury in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*). Considered on its own merits as a piece of English prose Henley's version has certain definite virtues. But of course a translation must also be judged by its success or failure in reproducing not only the exact significance of an alien idiom but also the stylistic traits and distinctive *bouquet* of the original. Appraised on this basis, Henley's translation leaves much to be desired. It is, in the first place, much too free, and often yields to the temptation of rounding off a phrase by the insertion of something which Beckford did not say. Some, but not all, of these apparent freedoms are to be explained by Henley's use of the first rough text. His chief fault, however, lies not so much in verbal inaccuracies as in his failure to preserve the rapidity and epigrammatic force of the original. Beckford's spare, economical French, written in conscious imitation of Voltaire, is replaced by an English style which (especially in the twentieth century) is excessively Latinized and cumbrous. The sparkling vintage of the French is, by some alchemy, transmuted into a solid port—a rich, palatable port, no doubt, yet not the equivalent of the champagne which it replaces.

Vathek's place in English literature is assured. In these days of few inhibitions, when edification in the narrow sense is no longer looked for as an important concomitant of a work of fiction, its appeal is greater than ever: there is no longer any danger of our taking 'the diabolical levity of its contempt for mankind' as a

serious reflection of its author's real attitude, as Hazlitt did. We may accept it for what it is, an *extravaganza*, strangely compact of humour, gorgeous colour, and awesome solemnity, having little relationship to real life and existing only to entertain. The preparation of this new version has been the outcome of a long-standing affection for the story—an affection which has not been dulled by the labour and constant re-reading which such a task imposes. It is the translator's wish that his work may be the means of giving equal pleasure to readers who have hitherto been unfamiliar with *Vathek*; while to those who already know the original or the older English version he can only express the hope that his attempt may be held to render with tolerable accuracy the spirit and substance of Beckford's work.

H. B. G.

VATHEK



VATHEK: AN ARABIAN TALE

VATHEK, ninth caliph of the Abasside line, was the son of Motassem and the grandson of Haroun al-Raschid. He came to the throne in the flower of his age, and the great qualities which he already possessed caused his subjects to hope that his reign would be long and happy. His countenance was pleasing and majestic; but, when he was angry, one of his eyes shone with such a terrible light that no man could endure its gaze, and the wretch on whom it was turned fell back in confusion and sometimes even expired on the spot. So, for fear of depopulating his country and making a desert of his palace, the prince took care that his anger was but rarely aroused.

He was much addicted to women and to the pleasures of the table: his generosity was unbounded and his debauchery without limit; for he did not hold the opinion of Omar Ben Abdalaziz, that to have paradise in the next world it is necessary to make one's life a hell in this.

He outdid all his predecessors in magnificence, and the Palace of Alkorremi, built by his father Motassem on the Hill of Piebald Horses, commanding the whole town of Samarah, was not huge enough for him. He added to it five wings, or rather five new palaces, devoting each to the satisfaction of one of the senses.

In the first, the tables were perpetually covered with the choicest viands, which were renewed night and day as fast as they grew cold. The most delicate wines and the finest cordials flowed in billows from a hundred fountains which never ran dry. This palace was called *The Eternal Banquet*, or *The Insatiable*.

The second palace was named *The Temple of Melody*, or *The Nectar of the Soul*, and was inhabited by the most eminent poets and musicians of the day. After displaying their talents here, they would disperse in groups and make all the surrounding regions re-echo to their songs.

The palace called *The Delight of the Eye*, or *The Aid of Memory*, was one continuous enchantment. Curiosities

gathered from every corner of the earth were found there in profusion, arranged with the most excellent taste. Here was a gallery of pictures by the far-famed Mani, and statues which seemed as though they were alive. On the one hand an ingenious vista charmed the eye; on the other, it was pleasurably deceived by an optical illusion; elsewhere might be found all the treasures of nature. In a word, Vathek, of all men the most subject to curiosity, had left nothing undone to satisfy this faculty in his visitors.

The Palace of Perfumes, also called *The Incitement to Voluptuousness*, was divided into several halls. There torches and lamps exhaling aromatic odours were lit even at high noon. If a guest desired to dispel the pleasant intoxication brought on by this place, he could go down into a spacious garden where the air was made mild and restorative by flowers of every kind.

In the fifth palace, called *The Retreat of Joy*, or *Palace Dangerous*, were to be found several bands of young girls, as lovely and engaging as the houris, who never tired of giving kind welcome to all those whom the Caliph pleased to admit to their presence.

Vathek in no wise forfeited the regard of his people because of the voluptuous delights in which he immersed

himself. The general opinion was that a sovereign who gives himself up to pleasure is at least as fit to govern as one who is pleasure's declared enemy. But his ardent and restless character would not allow him to be content with this. During his father's lifetime he had studied so much, in order to banish boredom, that he was learned; but at last he wished to fathom all things, even the sciences which do not exist. He liked to argue with learned men, but they had to take care not to carry contradiction too far. Some he silenced with presents, but those whose stubbornness resisted his liberality were sent to prison to cool their blood—a remedy which often succeeded.

Vathek also took pleasure in theological discussions, and was never found to support the opinion which was looked upon as orthodox. By this he put all the pious against him: so then he persecuted them, for he wished at all costs to be in the right.

The great Prophet, Mahomet, whose Vicars the caliphs are, became incensed, in the seventh heaven, by the irreligious behaviour of his successor. 'Let him go his way,' said he, to the genii who perpetually await his orders. 'Let us see where his folly and impiety will lead him. If he goes too far, we shall know well enough how to punish him. Help him to build this tower, which, in

imitation of Nimrod, he has begun to set up; not, like that great warrior, in order to preserve himself from a new deluge, but through an insolent desire to penetrate the secrets of heaven. All in vain, for never will he divine the fate which awaits him!’

The genii obeyed, and when the labourers raised the tower by a cubit during the day, their supernatural assistants added two more in the night. The rapid progress of this building flattered Vathek’s vanity, for he supposed that even dead matter was lending its aid to his projects. This prince, despite all his knowledge, did not remember that the successes of the foolish and the wicked are the first rods which are used to smite them.

His pride reached its height when he had climbed for the first time the fifteen hundred steps of his tower, and looked down on the world below. Men seemed like ants, mountains like mole-hills, and Samarah itself a beehive. The idea of his own greatness which this height gave him quite turned his head, and he was just about to begin worshipping himself when, raising his eyes, he saw that the stars seemed just as far away as they had been when he was on the ground. However, he consoled himself for the involuntary feeling of insignificance by thinking how great he would appear in the eyes of others; and besides,

he flattered himself that the light of his understanding would travel far beyond the utmost limit of his vision, and would wrest from the stars the secrets of his fate.

To this end, he spent nearly every night on the top of his tower, and, believing himself to be initiated into the mysteries of astrology, he imagined that the planets were foretelling wonderful adventures for him, indicating that a man of strange aspect, from a country which had never before been heard of, would come to herald their commencement. He therefore had a closer watch kept for all foreigners, and proclaimed with the trumpet in the streets of Samarah that no traveller was to be taken in or detained by any of his subjects, but that all strangers should be forthwith brought to the palace.

Not long after this proclamation there came to the city a man whose countenance was so fearsome that the guards who apprehended him were forced to close their eyes as they led him to the palace. The Caliph himself appeared astounded at his horrible appearance, but the first shock soon gave place to joy. The stranger displayed before him such rarities as he had never seen, nor even imagined.

For in truth nothing could have been more extraordinary than this foreigner's wares. Most of the trinkets were as finely wrought as they were magnificent, and each had

besides a particular virtue, set forth on a scroll of parchment attached to it. There were slippers which by spontaneous movements saved the trouble of walking, knives which would cut without being handled, and sabres which could deal a blow themselves with the slightest movement.

Among these wonderful curiosities were certain sabres whose blades shone with a dazzling fiery light. These above all the Caliph wished to possess, meaning to decipher at his leisure the strange characters engraved on them. Without asking the merchant his price, he caused all the minted gold in his treasury to be brought out, and told the man to take what he would. The stranger took but little, and said no word.

Vathek, not doubting but that this silence was caused by the respect which his own presence inspired, called the merchant forward kindly and inquired affably who he was, whence he came, and where he had acquired such beautiful things. The man, or rather monster, instead of replying, thrice rubbed his forehead, which was blacker than ebony, smote four times his enormous paunch, opened his great eyes, which were like two flaming coals, and broke into laughter, making a fearsome clamour and showing huge teeth of an amber colour streaked with green.

The Caliph, somewhat disconcerted, repeated his question, but, receiving no other reply, began to lose patience and cried: 'Unhappy man, knowest thou who I am, and at whom thou mockest?' Then he asked his guards whether they had heard the man speak. They replied that he had spoken, but had not said anything of much moment. 'Let him speak again, then,' answered Vathek; 'let him speak as best he can, and tell me who he is, whence he comes, and whence he has brought these strange curiosities which he has offered to me. I swear by Balaam's ass that if he remains silent any longer I will make him repent of his obstinacy.' In pronouncing these words, the Caliph could not prevent himself from darting one of his dangerous glances at the stranger: but the man lost no whit of his self-possession and the terrible and murderous eye had no effect on him.

Words are powerless to express the astonishment of the courtiers when they saw that the churlish merchant could bear such a trial. They had all thrown themselves down with their faces to the earth, and would have remained thus had not the Caliph cried to them in a furious voice: 'Arise, cowards, and seize this wretch! Let him be dragged to prison and kept under constant surveillance by my best soldiers! He may take with him the gold I have just

given him; let him keep it, but he must speak.' At these words they fell upon the stranger, loaded him with heavy chains, and imprisoned him in the great tower. Seven barriers consisting of bars of iron, to which were fixed spikes as long and sharp as spits, surrounded him on all sides.

Meanwhile the Caliph remained in a state of the most violent agitation. He would scarcely sit at table, and of the three hundred dishes which were served up to him each day he would only taste thirty-two. This unusual abstemiousness alone would have prevented him from sleeping, but, combined with the anxiety which consumed him, its effect was terrible. So, as soon as it was light he hastened to the prison to make new efforts to break down the stranger's obstinacy. But his rage was indescribable when he saw that the man was no longer there, that the iron gates were broken and the guards lifeless. He was seized with the strangest frenzy, and began violently kicking the corpses which lay around, belabouring them thus all day long. His courtiers and viziers did everything they could to pacify him, but finding they met with no success, they cried out as with one voice: 'The Caliph has gone mad! The Caliph has gone mad!'

This cry was soon taken up in all the streets of Samarah, and at last reached the ears of the Princess Carathis, Vathek's mother. She hastened forth, full of alarm, to try her influence over the mind of her son. Her tears and embraces were successful in calming him; and soon, yielding to her persuasions, he allowed himself to be led back to the palace.

Carathis took good care not to leave her son by himself, but, after she had had him put to bed, sat beside him and tried to calm and console him by her words. No one could have been more likely to succeed in this, for Vathek loved and respected her not only as a mother but also as a woman endowed with very great talents. She was a Greek, and had made him adopt all the systems and sciences of that race, which were abhorred by all good Mussulmans.

One of these sciences was judicial astrology, and of this Carathis was a past mistress. Her first care, therefore, was to recall to her son what the stars had promised him and to propose that he should consult them again. 'Alas!' said the Caliph, as soon as he could speak; 'I am a mad-man, not because I have given forty thousand kicks to my guards, who were blockheads enough to let themselves die, but because I did not realize that this was the

strange man the planets had announced to me. Instead of ill-treating him, I should have tried to gain his confidence by kindness and favours.' 'The past cannot be recalled,' replied Carathis; 'we must look to the future: perhaps you will see once more the man whose loss you bemoan; perhaps the writings engraved on the sabre-blades will give you news of him. Eat and sleep, my dear son, and to-morrow we will see what is best to be done.'

Vathek followed this wise counsel as best he could, arose in a better state of mind next morning, and immediately caused the magic sabres to be brought to him. He examined them through tinted glass, so as to avoid being dazzled, and did his best to decipher the characters, but it was of no avail. In vain did he smite his forehead, for not one letter could he understand; and he would have fallen into his first madness again had not Carathis opportunely entered.

'Have patience, my son,' said she; 'assuredly you are versed in all the sciences: the knowledge of languages is but a trifle fit for pedants. Offer a reward worthy of yourself to those who shall explain these barbarous words you cannot understand and which it is beneath you to comprehend, and soon you will have satisfaction.'

'That may be!' replied the Caliph; 'but meanwhile I

shall be wearied with a crowd of the half-learned, who will make the attempt as much for the sake of hearing their own babblings as in the hope of gaining the reward.' After thinking a moment he added: 'I wish to escape that inconvenience; I will put to death all those who do not satisfy me; for, thank Heaven, I have enough perspicacity to see whether a man is translating or whether he is inventing.'

'Oh! I do not doubt that,' replied Carathis. 'But to put the ignorant to death is rather a severe punishment and might have dangerous consequences. Content yourself with burning their beards, for beards are of less consequence to the state than men.' Once more the Caliph yielded to his mother's reasoning, and summoned his Grand Vizier to his presence. 'Morakanabad,' said he, 'proclaim by the public crier in Samarah and every town in my empire that he who shall decipher some characters which appear to be indecipherable shall receive proofs of that generosity which is known to all the world; but that if any man make the attempt and fail, his beard shall be burnt to the last hair. Let it also be proclaimed that I will give fifty beautiful slaves and fifty boxes of apricots from the Isle of Kirmith to him who shall bring me news of this strange man whom I wish to see once more.'

The Caliph's subjects, in this following the example of their sovereign, were very fond of women and boxes of apricots from the Isle of Kirmith, so that these promises made their mouths water; but they made no attempts, for no one knew what had become of the stranger. With the Caliph's first inquiry things were different, and the learned, the half-learned, and crowds who were neither one nor the other but had no small opinion of themselves, came forward courageously to risk their beards, but they all lost them. The eunuchs did nothing but burn beards, which caused such a smell of singeing to hang about them that the women of the harem complained and the task had to be given to others.

At last one day there appeared an old man whose beard surpassed by a cubit and a half in length all those which had previously been seen. The officers of the palace, in introducing him, whispered among themselves: 'What a pity! What a great pity to burn such a fine beard!' The Caliph thought the same, but his concern was unnecessary, for the old man read the characters with ease, interpreting them word for word as follows: 'We were made where everything is well made; we are the least of the marvels in a land where everything is marvellous and worthy of the greatest Prince of the earth.'

'Oh! thou hast translated with perfect fidelity,' cried Vathek; 'I know who it is that these characters designate. Let this old man be given as many robes of honour and as many thousand sequins as he has spoken words; he has cleansed my heart of a part of the gloom¹ which enveloped it.' After speaking thus, Vathek asked the man to dine with him, and even invited him to spend some days in the palace.

The following day the Caliph sent for him and said: 'Read once again what thou hast read yesterday; I cannot hear too often those words which seem to promise me the good fortune after which I sigh.' The old man at once put on his green spectacles, but they fell from his nose when he perceived that the characters he had read the evening before had been replaced by different ones. 'What ails thee?' asked the Caliph; 'what meanest thou by these signs of astonishment?' 'Sovereign of the world! The characters written on these sabres are no longer the same!' 'What sayest thou?' answered Vathek. 'But no matter; interpret them if thou canst.' 'Highness, they run thus,' said the old man: 'Woe to the rash man who would pry into that which it is forbidden to know and attempt that which is beyond his power.' 'Woe unto

¹ *gloom*. See textual note, p. 170.

thee!' cried the Caliph, beside himself with rage; 'begone from my presence! Thou shalt escape with the burning of but half thy beard, for yesterday thou didst interpret well; and as for my gifts to thee, keep them, for I never take back what I have given.' The old man, who was wise enough to know that he had come off cheaply after being foolish enough to tell his master a disagreeable truth, at once withdrew and was thenceforward seen no more.

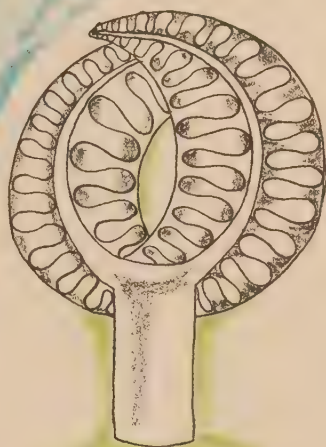
It was not long before Vathek began to regret his impetuosity, for he pored over the characters without intermission and found that they did, in fact, change every day, and no one came forward to explain them. This anxious concentration heated his blood, brought on dizziness and dazzling of the eyes, and so weakened him that he could scarcely hold himself up. While he was in this condition he would not discontinue his visits to the tower, but was carried there; for he hoped to learn something propitious from the stars, but in this he was deceived. His eyes, dimmed by the vapours in his head, performed their function but ill, and he could see nothing save a thick black cloud, which seemed the most evil of omens.

Racked by so much anxiety, the Caliph lost his spirits entirely. He was devoured with an unnatural thirst; and

his mouth, ever open like a funnel, took in torrents of fluid day and night. Then this unhappy prince, unable to take pleasure in anything, caused the Palaces of the Five Senses to be shut up, ceased to appear in public, to parade his magnificence and dispense justice to his people, and withdrew into the retirement of his harem. He had always been a good husband, so his wives were broken-hearted at his condition and never tired of offering up prayers for his health and giving him to drink.

Meanwhile the Princess Carathis, full of the most painful concern, took counsel every day with the Vizier Morakanabad, seeking means to cure or at least to relieve the invalid. Convinced that it was a case of witchcraft, they delved together into the books dealing with magic, and had a thorough search made for the horrible stranger, whom they accused of having wrought the enchantment.

Some miles from Samarah there was a high mountain covered with thyme and serpolet, whose summit formed a delightful plateau fit to be the paradise of the faithful Mussulman. It had a hundred groves of sweetly scented shrubs, where the orange-tree, the lemon-tree, and the citron intertwined with the palm and the vine, affording full satisfaction to both the taste and the sense of smell. The ground was strewn with violets, and bunches



of gilliflowers filled the air with their balmy perfumes. Four limpid springs, so abundant that they could have quenched the thirst of ten armies, seemed placed here expressly to complete the resemblance of this spot to the Garden of Eden, watered by the sacred streams. On their verdant banks the nightingale sang the birth of the rose, his well-beloved, and made his plaint because of the transience of her charms; the turtle-dove mourned the loss of more real pleasures, while the lark greeted with his song the light which renews the life of nature. Here, more than in any other place in the world, the twittering of the birds bore witness to their multifarious loves; and the delicious fruits which they could peck at will seemed to increase their ardour twofold.

To this place Vathek was sometimes brought, so that he might have the benefit of pure air and assuage his thirst by draughts from the four springs. His mother, his wives, and a few eunuchs were the only persons who went there with him. Each of them attentively filled great bowls of rock-crystal and contended among themselves as to who should be the first to lift them to his lips; but their zeal could not keep pace with his avidity and he often lay flat on the ground to lap up the water.

One day, when the unfortunate prince had remained

a long time in this debasing position, a hoarse but loud voice was heard to address him thus: 'O Caliph! who art so proud in thy dignity and power, why dost thou perform the act of a dog?' Hearing this, Vathek lifted up his head and beheld that very stranger who had caused him such grievous pain; at which sight he became inflamed with rising anger and cried: 'And thou, cursed Giaour, what dost thou here? Art thou not content with having made a prince once agile and nimble like unto a water-skin? Canst thou not perceive that I must die, either from a surfeit of drinking or from thirst?'

'Then drink also this draught,' said the stranger, handing him a phial filled with a reddish-coloured liquid, 'and, to dry up the thirst of thy soul, after assuaging that of the body, know that I am an Indian, though the part of India whence I come is known to no man.'

These words came like a ray of light on the Caliph's darkened mind, for they constituted the fulfilment of some portion of his desires, and so, in the fond hope that all were to be satisfied, he took the magic liquor and drank it off without hesitation. Immediately he felt restored, his thirst was quenched, and his bodily agility was greater than it had ever been. Then he rejoiced exceedingly, and, throwing his arms round the neck of the

fearsome Indian, he kissed that horrible gaping, slobbering mouth with as much ardour as though he were pressing the coral lips of one of his most beautiful wives.

There would have been no end to these transports had not the voice of Carathis restored tranquillity. She persuaded her son to return to Samarah, and he caused a herald to go before him crying aloud with all the force of his lungs: 'The wonderful stranger has reappeared and cured the Caliph! He has spoken! He has spoken!'

All the citizens of this huge town at once poured forth from their houses, and, great and small, crowded together to see Vathek and the Indian go by. They shouted without cessation: 'He has cured our Sovereign; he has spoken! He has spoken!' These words were on every one's lips the whole day long, and were not forgotten at the public festivals which were given the same evening in token of rejoicing; the poets made them the refrain of all the songs which they composed on this notable subject.

The Caliph then reopened the Palaces of the Five Senses, and, as he felt most in need of visiting that devoted to Taste, he gave orders that a sumptuous banquet should be served there, to which he invited his favourites and all his officers of high rank. The Indian, seated in the place of honour by the Caliph's side, behaved as though

he thought that in order to deserve this position he could not eat, drink, and talk enough; and the viands disappeared from the table as soon as they were served. The guests stared at the Indian in astonishment, but he, without seeming to be aware of their scrutiny, drank bumpers to every one's health, sang in an ear-splitting voice, told stories at which he laughed himself in full-throated tones, and made sallies which would have been applauded had he not uttered them with terrible grimaces. The whole meal through he never ceased to chatter as much as twenty astrologers, eat more than a hundred porters and drink in proportion.

Even though the table had been served more than thrice ten times the Caliph had felt great annoyance at the voracity of his neighbour, whose presence became intolerable to him, so that it was only with difficulty that he could dissemble his spleen and vexation. At length he found the means to whisper into the ear of his chief eunuch: 'Thou seest, Bababalouk, that this man does everything on a large scale. Go, therefore, redouble thy vigilance, and above all keep a strict watch over my Circassian girls.'

The bird of morning had thrice lifted up his voice in song when the hour of the Divan was sounded. Vathek

had promised to preside over it in person, so he rose from table leaning on his Vizier's arm, hardly able to stand, being rendered dizzy less by the wine he had drunk than by the din made by his uproarious guest.

The viziers, the officers of the Crown, and the men of law ranged themselves around their sovereign in a half-circle in respectful silence; while the Indian, with as much calmness as if he had been keeping fast, carelessly took up his position on one of the steps of the throne and laughed covertly at the indignation which his boldness aroused in the spectators.

Meanwhile the Caliph, whose head was fuddled, was dispensing justice indiscriminately. Perceiving this, the Grand Vizier suddenly thought of an expedient for interrupting the audience and saving his master's honour. He said to Vathek in a low voice: 'My lord, the Princess Carathis, who has spent the night in consulting the stars, would have you know that you are threatened by an immediate danger. Take good care that this stranger, whom you have rewarded for a few magic jewels with such great honours, does not attempt your life. Though his potion has seemed to cure you, it is perhaps but a poison which will take effect suddenly. Do not brush aside this suspicion; at least ask him of what the draught was com-

posed and where he procured it, and bring up the matter of the sabres, which you seem to have forgotten.'

Wearied by the insolent behaviour of the Indian, Vathek replied to his Vizier by a movement of the head and addressed himself to the monster. 'Arise,' said he, 'and declare in full Divan of what drugs was composed the potion which thou hast given me to drink; and unravel the secret of the sabres thou hast sold me, and thus prove that thou art sensible of the favours with which I have loaded thee.'

The Caliph spoke these words with as much civility as the circumstances allowed, and then waited in silence. The Indian, however, neither made answer nor changed his position, but burst forth anew into loud guffaws, accompanying them with horrible grimaces. At this, Vathek could no longer contain himself; with a kick he knocked the man from the dais, and, following him up, began to strike him with a rapidity that excited the emulation of all who were present at the Divan. Every foot came into action, and no sooner had each assailant given one kick than he felt impelled to give another and still harder one.

The Indian provided good sport, for, as he was short and plump, he had curled himself up into a ball, and rolled about from one point to another, followed by the

guards and courtiers who pursued him with extraordinary enthusiasm. Rolling thus from hall to hall, from room to room, the ball drew after it all whom it encountered, and the whole palace, thrown into complete disorder, resounded to the most terrible din. The frightened sultanas looked out from behind their curtains, and as soon as the ball appeared they could not restrain themselves from following it. In vain did the eunuchs pinch them till they bled: they escaped from the hands of these faithful guardians, who, though half-dead with fright, could not even prevent themselves from following in the track of the fatal ball.

After rolling thus through all the halls, rooms, kitchens, gardens, and stables of the palace, the Indian at last took the road towards the courts. The Caliph, more relentless than the others, followed closely, giving him as many kicks as he could, and such was his zeal that he himself received some volleys meant for the ball.

Carathis, Morakanabad, and two or three of the other viziers, who had so far preserved enough self-control to resist the general attraction, wishing to prevent the Caliph from making himself a ridiculous spectacle, threw themselves down in his path with the idea of stopping him, but he leapt over their heads and went on his way. They

then ordered the muezzins to call the people to prayer, as much to clear the streets as in the hope that their petitions would avert calamity; but all was of no avail. The sight of this infernal ball was enough to draw every man after it. The very muezzins themselves, though they could only see the crowd in the distance, came down from their minarets and helped to swell its numbers, and it assumed such proportions that before long every house in Samarah was deserted except for the paralytic, the cripples, the dying, and children at the breast whose nurses had abandoned them in order to run more quickly. Even Carathis, Morakanabad, and the others had at last joined the throng. The cries of the women, escaped from their harems, the shouts of the eunuchs, struggling to keep them in sight, the oaths of the husbands who threatened one another as they ran, the kicks delivered broadcast, the constant stumblings—all these things caused Samarah to assume the aspect of a town taken by assault and given up to pillage. At last the accursed Indian, still in the shape of a ball, after having made a tour of the streets and public squares, left the town empty, took the road towards the Plain of Catoul, and rolled along a valley at the foot of the Mountain of the Four Springs.

At one side of this valley was a high hill; the other was

bounded by a fearsome ravine which had been cut out by the action of water. The Caliph and the thronging populace feared that the ball would fall into this, and redoubled their efforts to catch up with it, but all to no purpose, for it rolled into the chasm and disappeared in a flash.

Vathek would undoubtedly have thrown himself down after the perfidious Giaour if he had not been held back as by an invisible hand. At the same time the crowd came to a standstill and everything became quiet. Men looked at one another in astonishment, and though they cut a ridiculous figure nobody seemed inclined to laugh. With downcast eyes and an air of silent bewilderment they all retraced their steps towards Samarah and betook themselves to their houses, little suspecting that it could have been no less than a supernatural agency which had caused them to behave so extravagantly; for it is but just that mankind, who take credit to themselves for the good of which they are only the passive instruments, should also lay at their own doors the foolishness which in truth they are powerless to avoid.

The Caliph alone refused to leave the valley, and, despite the arguments of Carathis and Morakanabad, he commanded his tents to be pitched there, taking up a position on the edge of the chasm. In vain was it pointed out to

him that the earth was quite likely to crumble away in this place, and also that he was too near to the magician: he remained obdurate to all persuasions. After having caused a thousand torches to be lighted and their number to be continually augmented, he stretched himself out in the mud at the verge of the precipice and tried, by the aid of this artificial light, to pierce the darkness of the depths which not all the lights of the empyrean could have penetrated. One moment he imagined he could hear voices rising up from the depths of the abysm; the next, he thought he could distinguish the accents of the Indian; but it was nothing but the roaring of the waters and the noise of the cataracts which fell in great bubbling torrents from the mountain-side.

In this appalling position Vathek remained the whole night through. At the first blush of dawn he retired to his tent, and, without taking any food, fell asleep, awakening again only when darkness covered the earth once more. He then resumed his position on the edge of the gulf. For several nights he continued to do this, and was often to be seen stalking about with his gaze fixed furiously on the stars, as though he were reproaching them for having deceived him.

Then suddenly the blue of the sky became streaked with

long rays of blood, which stretched from above the valley to Samarah, where they seemed to touch the top of the great tower. The Caliph wished to ascend the tower, but all his strength had gone out of him, and, terrified beyond measure, he covered his head with the folds of his cloak.

Yet all these awesome portents only served to excite his curiosity, and so, instead of going home, he persisted in his plan of remaining on the spot where the Indian had disappeared.

One night, while he was keeping his lonely vigil in the plain, the moon and stars suddenly became eclipsed; instead of light, thick darkness came down; the earth trembled, and from out of its depths Vathek heard the voice of the Giaour, louder than thunder, crying: 'Wilt thou give thyself to me, adore the powers of earth and renounce Mahomet? If thou wilt do this, I will open to thee the gates of the Palace of Subterranean Fire. There in vast vaults thou shalt see the treasures which the stars have promised thee; from there it is that I brought my sabres; there it is that Suleiman, son of Daoud, reposes, surrounded by the talismans which subdue the world.'

The astonished Caliph answered trembling, but nevertheless in the voice of a man not unused to supernatural events: 'Where art thou? Appear before mine eyes! Banish

this darkness which has so long oppressed me! After my having burned so many torches in the effort to discover thee, the least thou canst do is to show me thy fearsome countenance.' 'Abjure Mahomet, then,' returned the Indian. 'Give me proofs of thy sincerity, or never shalt thou see my face.'

The unhappy Caliph promised all that was asked of him, and immediately the heavens were lit up, and by the light of the planets, which seemed to be wrapt in flame, he saw a great fissure in the earth. At its lowest depth appeared an ebony portal, and standing before this was the Indian, holding a golden key which he clinked against the lock.

'Ah!' cried Vathek, 'how can I come down to thee? Come and take me, and open thy door speedily.' 'Very fine,' answered the Indian; 'know that I am mightily athirst, and cannot open the portal until my thirst is assuaged, which can only be effected by the blood of fifty children. Secure them for me from among those of thy viziers and the great ones of thy court, for otherwise neither my thirst nor thy curiosity will be satisfied. Return, then, to Samarah; bring unto me that which I desire, cast it thyself into this chasm, and then thou shalt see.'

Having spoken thus the Indian turned away. Inspired

by demons the Caliph resolved to make the frightful sacrifice; and so, pretending that he had regained his equanimity, he made his way towards Samarah amid the acclamations of the people, who still retained their affection for him. Though he was depressed, in spite of himself, he dissembled this so well that he was able to deceive Carathis and Morakanabad as well as the others. Every one's mouth was full of talk of festivals and rejoicings; even the subject of the ball (about which hitherto no one had dared to speak) was now brought up and everywhere caused great laughter. But in point of fact it was no laughing matter for all of them, not a few being still in the hands of the surgeons in consequence of the injuries they had received in that memorable affair.

Vathek felt all the better pleased that the matter was looked upon in this light, for he saw that such an attitude was the better calculated to serve his nefarious ends. He preserved an affable demeanour towards everybody, and above all towards the viziers and the nobles, whom he bade next day to a sumptuous banquet. At this feast he twisted the conversation round to the subject of their children, and asked in a benign manner which of them possessed the most handsome young sons. Immediately each father went out of his way to extol the merits of his

own sons above all others; and the debate became so heated that they would have come to blows had they not been restrained by the presence of the Caliph, who pretended that he wished to judge for himself.

Not long afterwards a band of these unfortunate children came to the palace, decked out by their tender mothers in the way most calculated to heighten their beauty. But while the heart of every one else went out to these lovely children Vathek was examining them with a treacherous greed, and selecting fifty of them to sacrifice to the Giaour. When he had mentally made his choice he assumed an air of benevolence and proposed that his young favourites should be given a festival in the plain, for he said that they, more than all others, should have cause to rejoice that he had been restored to health.

The Caliph's kindness won all hearts, and was soon known throughout Samarah. Litters were made ready, camels and horses were brought out, and women, children, old men, and young people took their places as they wished. The cavalcade went forward, followed by all the confectioners of the town and the suburbs. The people followed on foot in crowds, and every one rejoiced, not one remembering what the last journey in this direction had cost several of them.

It was a beautiful evening; the air was fresh, the sky untroubled, and the flowers put forth their sweetest perfumes. Nature at rest seemed to rejoice in the rays of the setting sun, whose soft light gilded the summit of the Mountain of the Four Springs, beautified its slopes and bathed the leaping flocks in refulgence. Not a sound was to be heard save the murmuring of the fountains, the note of the reed-pipes and the voices of the shepherds calling to one another on the hill-sides.

The scene was made still more attractive by the poor children who were going all unawares to their doom. Suspecting nothing, they went forward towards the plain full of childish pranks. Some chased butterflies, others picked flowers or gathered up shining pebbles, and a few rambled away for the greater pleasure it gave them to overtake their companions again and salute them with kisses.

Already it was possible to discern the horrible gulf at the bottom of which was the ebony portal. It cut across the plain like a black line, and was thought by Morakana-bad and his colleagues to be one of those strange works which the Caliph was pleased to make. Unhappy men! Little did they know the purpose it was to serve! Vathek, not wishing that this fatal place should be too closely examined, caused a halt to be called, and had a wide

circle traced out on the ground. The guard of eunuchs then set about measuring the course for the foot-races, and got ready the rings which were to serve as targets for the archers. The fifty boys hastily undressed and displayed to the admiring multitude the pleasing contours of their delicate limbs. Their eyes sparkled with joy, which was reflected in those of their relatives, who each gave encouragement to the young competitor that interested him most: the games of these sweet and innocent children took up the attention of every one.

The Caliph seized upon this moment to draw away from the crowd, and, advancing to the verge of the chasm, heard (but not without trembling) the Indian saying as he gnashed his teeth: 'Where are they?' 'Pitiless Giaour!' answered Vathek, troubled at heart, 'is there nothing which will content thee but the sacrifice which thou hast decreed? Ah! if thou sawest the beauty of these children, their grace and their unsuspecting trustfulness, thou wouldst be moved thereby. 'A plague on thy soft-heartedness, chatterer!' cried the Indian. 'Give them to me, and that right speedily, or my portal shall be closed to thee for ever.' 'Then do not shout so loud,' replied the Caliph, blushing. 'Oh, I agree to that,' returned the Giaour, with an ogreish smile; 'I see that

thou art not lacking in discretion, and will have patience yet a moment longer.'

While this dreadful conversation was going on the young boys were at the height of their liveliness and fun. At last, when dusk touched the mountains, their sports came to an end; and then the Caliph, standing on the verge of the chasm, shouted with all his might: 'Let my fifty little favoured ones draw near, coming in the order of the success they have won in the games! To the first I will give my diamond bracelet, to the second my emerald collar, to the third my girdle of topaz, and to each of the others a part of my raiment, even to the shoes on my feet.'

At these words the applause broke out with redoubled force, and the generosity of a prince who would strip himself naked to amuse his subjects and encourage the young was lauded to the skies. Meanwhile the Caliph, disrobing garment by garment, and lifting his arm as high as possible, made each of the prizes sparkle; but while with one hand he presented the gift to the eager child, with the other he pushed the recipient into the chasm, where the Giaour, incessantly growling, repeated without intermission the word: 'More! More!'

This horrible arrangement was so quick that each child who ran forward could have no suspicion of the fate of

those who had gone before; and the lookers-on were prevented from seeing anything by the darkness and the distance at which they stood. At length, Vathek, having cast the fiftieth victim to his doom, thought that the Giaour would come and take him and give him the golden key. Already he thought himself as great as Suleiman, and was fain to believe that he would have no account to render of his behaviour, when, to his great surprise, the chasm closed up and he felt the earth under his feet as firm and solid as usual. His rage and despair were indescribable. He cursed the perfidy of the Indian, called him by the most infamous names, and kicked the soil as though to make himself heard. He continued thus until, worn out, he fell to the ground like one senseless. His viziers and the great ones of his court, who were nearer to him than the others, thought at first that he was sitting down on the grass to play with the children; but, being seized with a certain anxiety, they went forward and saw the Caliph quite alone. 'What do you want?' said he, with an air of bewilderment. 'Our children! Our children!' they cried. 'You are fine fellows to want to make me responsible for the accidents of nature,' he answered; 'your children were playing near the precipice which was here, and fell in; and I should have fallen also, had I not leapt backward.'

Hearing this, the fathers of the fifty children gave vent to piercing cries, which were repeated by the mothers an octave higher; while the others, without knowing why the uproar had arisen, outdid it with a great howling. Soon they were saying among themselves on all sides: 'It is a trick the Caliph has played us to please his cursed Giaour; let us punish him for his perfidy, and avenge ourselves! Vengeance for the spilling of innocent blood! Throw this cruel prince into the cataract, and let his very memory be annihilated!'

Carathis, frightened by this outcry, came up to Morakanabad, and said: 'Vizier, you have lost two beautiful children, and must be the most heartbroken of fathers; but you are virtuous. Save your master.' 'Yes, Madam,' answered the Vizier, 'I am going to try to rescue him from the danger in which he stands, at the peril of my life; but after that I will abandon him to his unhappy fate.' 'Bababalouk,' she continued, 'put yourself at the head of your eunuchs; let us keep the crowd off, and if possible bring this unhappy prince back to his palace.' Bababalouk and his companions congratulated themselves for the first time (but in very low voices) that they had been debarred from the honours and cares of pater-nity. They took their orders from the Vizier, who, sup-

porting them to the best of his ability, at last succeeded in his generous enterprise. He then withdrew, to weep at leisure.

As soon as the Caliph had come into the palace, Carathis caused the gates to be closed. But, seeing that the feelings of the populace continued to rise, and that imprecations were descending in volleys from all sides, she said to her son: 'It matters not whether you are right or wrong; your life must be saved. Let us retire into your apartments, and pass from there into the underground tunnel which is known only to you and me, which will lead us to the tower, where, with the help of the mutes, who always reside there, we shall be safe. Bababalouk will think we are still in the palace, and will put up a defence at the gate in his own interests; and in the meantime, without cumbering ourselves with the advice of this blubbering Morakanabad, we may consider what is best to be done.'

To his mother's exhortations Vathek answered not a single word, and he allowed himself to be led in the way she wished; but as he walked he kept repeating: 'Where art thou, horrible Giaour? Hast thou not yet finished devouring the children? Where are thy sabres, thy golden key and thy talismans?' These words gave Carathis some

inkling of the truth, and when her son, once installed in the tower, had regained some of his self-possession, she was able without much trouble to draw the whole story from him. She was far from scrupulous herself, being in fact as villainous as a woman can possibly be—which is saying a great deal, for the sex pride themselves on surpassing in everything any one who disputes their superiority. The Caliph's tale therefore caused Carathis neither surprise nor horror: she was simply struck by the promises of the Giaour, and said to Vathek: 'It cannot be gainsaid that this Giaour is somewhat bloodthirsty; the earthly powers, however, must be still more terrible; but the promises of the one and the gifts of the other are at least worth some small efforts, and no crime is too great when such treasures are the reward. Cease, then, to complain of the Indian's conduct; it seems to me that you have not fulfilled all the conditions he imposes. I do not doubt but that we must make a sacrifice to the deities of the underworld, and as soon as the tumult is over it is to that we must turn our thoughts. I will go and make peace, and will have no scruple about pouring out your treasures in the effort, since we shall soon have much more.'

The princess, who was wonderfully persuasive in her

ways, returned to the palace by the underground passage, and appeared at a window before the populace. She delivered them a harangue, while Bababalouk threw down great handfuls of gold. The combined effort was successful; the tumult died down, every man returned to his house, and Carathis made her way back to the tower.

The muezzins were calling the hour of morning prayer as Vathek and Carathis climbed the countless steps which led to the top, and though the morning was desolate and rainy they remained there for a considerable time, the dullness of the weather according with the mood of their wicked hearts. When they saw that the sun was about to pierce the clouds they had a pavilion erected to shelter them from its rays. Since the Caliph was worn out with fatigue, his first thought was rest, and, hoping to experience visions which should give him a sign, he lay down to sleep. The energetic Carathis, for her part, went down into the tower with a party of her mutes to prepare the sacrifice which she had planned for the following night.

First she descended, by small steps cut in the thickness of the walls, and known only to her and to Vathek, into mysterious pits which formed the repositories for a number of mummies of the ancient Pharaohs, filched from their tombs. Of these she took a goodly quantity, and

then made her way to a gallery where, under the guardianship of fifty dumb negresses, blind in the right eyes, were kept the oil from the most venomous serpents, the tusks of rhinoceroses, and logs cut by magicians in the interior of the Indies, which emitted a suffocating odour; not to mention a thousand other horrible rarities. Carathis herself had made this collection, in the hope of having, at some time or other, communication with the infernal powers, which she loved passionately and whose tastes she knew. In order to accustom herself to the horrors she had in contemplation she remained for some time among the negresses, who squinted in a seductive manner with the sole eye they possessed, and leered with delight at the death's-heads and skeletons. As these were taken out of the cupboards the negresses made the most frightful contortions; and, while admiring the princess, they uttered such piercing shrieks that she was nearly deafened. At last, stifled by the malodorous atmosphere, Carathis was forced to leave the gallery, after having drawn a part of her monstrous treasures from it.

Meanwhile the Caliph had not yet beheld the visions for which he had hoped, but in these exalted regions had succeeded in raising a voracious appetite. He had demanded food from the mutes, and, quite forgetting that

they were deaf, he beat them, bit them, and pinched them because they made no move to satisfy him. Happily for the miserable creatures, Carathis broke in on this indecent spectacle, arriving out of breath and crying: 'What is the matter, my son? I thought I heard the screams of a thousand bats which had been disturbed in their cave, and it is only the poor mutes whom you are maltreating: really you do not deserve the excellent stores I bring you.' 'Give them to me! Give them to me!' cried the Caliph; 'I am dying of hunger.' 'By Heaven, you would have a fine stomach if you could digest all I have here,' said she. 'Make haste,' replied the Caliph; 'but O Heaven! What horrid things are these! What are you going to do with them? This makes me turn sick.' 'Come, come,' replied Carathis, 'do not be so delicate, but help me to make my preparations; and you will see that the same objects which inspire you with horror will bring you happiness. Let us make ready the pyre for to-night's sacrifice, and take no thought of eating until it is prepared. Do you not know that solemn rites must always be preceded by a rigorous fast?'

The Caliph did not dare to make any answer, but gave himself up to his grief and to the flatulence which was beginning to harass his inner parts, while his mother



continued her preparations. Soon the phials of serpent-oil, the mummies, and the bones were set out on the balconies of the tower. The pyre gradually rose, and in three hours reached a height of twenty cubits. At last the shadows of night enveloped everything, and the joyful Carathis divested herself of her clothing, clapped her hands, and brandished a torch which burned the fats of the human body. The mutes followed her example, but Vathek, overcome with hunger, could no longer hold out and fell down in a swoon.

Already the burning drops from the torches were setting light to the magic logs, the poisoned oil was throwing forth a thousand bluish lights, and the burning mummies were emitting clouds of black and opaque smoke. At last the flames reached the rhinoceros tusks and caused such a vile stench that the Caliph's senses were suddenly restored to him, and he looked around him at the flame-lit spectacle with a bewildered eye. The blazing oil flowed in great torrents, and the negresses, who were constantly engaged in bringing more of it, united their howlings with the cries of Carathis. The flames became so violent and were so brilliantly reflected from the polished steel that the Caliph, no longer able to bear either their heat or their radiance, took refuge under the imperial standard.

The inhabitants of Samarah, astonished by the light which was illuminating the whole town, arose hastily from their beds and saw, from the house-tops, that the tower seemed to be on fire, and went down half-dressed to the square. At this juncture their love for their Sovereign was re-awakened, and, believing that he was in danger of being burned in his tower their one thought was to rescue him. Morakanabad came out, wiping away his tears, from the place to which he had retired, and cried: 'Fire!' like the others. Bababalouk, whose nose was accustomed to magic odours, suspected that Carathis was working some of her spells and advised every one to remain calm. He was treated as an old coward and an arrant traitor; and camels and dromedaries laden with water were brought to the scene of the fire; but the question remained, how was any one to gain entrance to the tower?

While the people were vigorously engaged in trying to force the doors a furious north-east wind arose and spread the flames far and wide, which at first drove the crowd back, but subsequently only caused them to redouble their zeal. The infernal stench from the tusks and the mummies was diffused all around, making the air so foul that several men fell to the ground almost suffocated,

while those who remained on their feet began to say to their nearest neighbours: 'Keep away, lest you become poisoned.' Morakanabad, more grievously affected than the others, was a pitiable sight: every man was constantly holding his nose, but nothing could stop those who were breaking down the doors. A hundred and forty of the strongest and most determined of them at length succeeded in their endeavours, gained the stairway and made considerable progress in a quarter of an hour.

Carathis, alarmed by the signs made by the mutes and negresses, descended a few steps and heard voices crying out that water was being brought. Being agile for her age, she quickly regained the platform and drew her son aside, saying: 'Suspend the sacrifice for a moment, for we shall soon have something with which to make it finer still. Some of these blockheads, no doubt thinking that the tower was afire, have had the temerity to break in the doors (which have hitherto been inviolate) and are coming up with water. It must be admitted that it is very good of them to forget all the wrongs you have done them, but that matters not. We will let them come up, and then sacrifice them to the Giaour: the mutes are not lacking either in strength or experience, and will easily be able to overcome people fatigued with the climb.' 'So

be it,' replied the Caliph, 'so long as the affair is soon over and I can dine.'

It was not long before the unhappy victims came on the scene. Breathless after their quick ascent of the fifteen hundred steps, and despairing because their water-skins were almost empty, they no sooner reached the summit than the brilliance of the flames and the odour of the mummies rendered them senseless—which was a pity, because they did not see the agreeable smile with which the mutes and negresses passed ropes around their necks; but the whole effect was not lost, for these amiable personages did not rejoice the less in a scene of this kind. Never were men strangled more easily; each fell without resistance and expired without a groan; and so Vathek soon found himself surrounded by the bodies of his most faithful subjects, which were thrown one by one on the pyre. Carathis, who thought of everything, believed that they now had enough, so she had the chains drawn and caused the steel gates in the passage to be closed.

Hardly had these orders been carried out when the tower trembled, the corpses disappeared, and the flames, which had been of a dark crimson colour, took on a beautiful rosy hue. A fragrant vapour made itself deliciously felt, the marble columns gave forth harmonious notes, and

the melted tusks exhaled a delightful perfume. Carathis was in ecstasies, and rejoiced by anticipation in the success of her spells, while the mutes and negresses, in whom the beautiful scents produced only colic, retired grumbling to their dens.

As soon as they had gone the scene changed. The pyre, the tusks, and the mummies gave place to a table magnificently set out with many sumptuous dishes, flagons of wine and vases of Fagfourî, wherein an excellent sherbet lay on snow. The Caliph fell upon this like a vulture and attacked a lamb stuffed with pistachio nuts; while Carathis, whose mind turned to quite other things, drew from a filigrane urn a scroll of parchment which seemed endless, but which her son had not even noticed. 'Make haste and finish, glutton,' said she, in a commanding tone, 'and listen to the magnificent promises which are made to you.' She then read aloud the following words: 'Vathek, my well-beloved, thou hast surpassed my hopes; my nostrils have savoured the smoke of thy mummies, of thine excellent tusks, and, above all, of that Mussulman blood which thou hast poured out on the pyre. When the moon reaches the full, set out from thy palace, surrounded with all the pomp of thy power: let thy musicians go before thee in choirs, to the sound of trum-

pets and the noise of cymbals. Let the best of thy slaves follow thee, likewise thy most cherished wives, and a thousand camels sumptuously laden, and take the road to Istakhar. There I await thee; there, crowned with the diadem of Gian Ben Gian, and revelling in all manner of delights, the talismans of Suleiman and the treasures of the pre-Adamite Sultans shall be delivered over to thee. But woe unto thee if at any place on thy way thou acceptest shelter.'

Though he was accustomed to luxury the Caliph had never before dined so well, and he now gave himself up to the joy such good news inspired, and turned anew to the wine. Carathis was no enemy to the juice of the grape, and pledged him in all his toasts which he ironically drank to the health of Mahomet. This treacherous liquor at last filled them with an impious bravado and caused them to blaspheme, making scandalous jokes on Balaam's ass, the dog of the Seven Sleepers, and the other animals which are in the Paradise of the Holy Prophet. In this pretty condition they gaily descended the fifteen hundred steps, joking at the serious faces of the people in the square, which they could see through the windows of the tower; and, by the subterranean passage, gained the royal apartments. Bababalouk was walking about

there tranquilly enough, giving his orders to the eunuchs, who were snuffing the candles and painting the beautiful eyes of the Circassians. No sooner did he set eyes on the Caliph than he said: 'Ah! so you are not burnt, I see; I feared you might be.' 'What does it matter what thou thinkest?' cried Carathis. 'Get thee hence, run and tell Morakanabad that we wish to speak with him, and above all do not tarry to make thy foolish observations.'

The Grand Vizier came at once, and was received with great gravity by Vathek and his mother, who told him in plaintive accents that the fire at the top of the tower had been put out, but that unfortunately it had cost the lives of the brave men who had come to their aid.

'Still more evils!' groaned Morakanabad; 'Ah! Commander of the Faithful, our Holy Prophet is doubtless angered against us, and it is for you to appease his anger.' 'We will appease him well enough,' replied the Caliph, with a smile that boded no good. 'You will have sufficient leisure to devote yourself to your prayers, for I find that this country is undermining my health and I mean to try the effect of a different air; the Mountain of the Four Springs bores me, and I feel I must drink of the stream Rocnabad and refresh myself in the beautiful valleys its waters. In my absence you will govern my realms ac-

cording to the advice of my mother, and be sure that you provide her with everything she may desire for her researches; for you are well aware that our tower is full of things which are most valuable in the study of science.'

The mention of the tower was by no means pleasing to Morakanabad, since the building of it had consumed vast amounts of treasure and he had seen nothing taken into it except negresses, mutes, and abominable drugs. He was equally at a loss to know what to make of Carathis, whose nature was as changeable as the coat of the chameleon. Her accursed eloquence had often well-nigh driven the poor Mussulman to despair; yet even though he had but a poor opinion of her, her son was still worse, and Morakanabad was glad to be rid of him. He therefore set about calming the people and making all preparations for his master's journey.

Vathek, hoping still further to gain the approbation of the spirits in the subterranean palace, planned this expedition on a scale of unheard-of magnificence, confiscating the property of his subjects right and left to this end, while his worthy mother visited the harems and despoiled them of their jewels. All the seamstresses and embroideresses of Samarah and the other large towns for fifty miles around worked without respite on the

palanquins and litters which were to grace the train of the Monarch. All the beautiful cloth of Masulipatam was used up, and it took so much muslin to beautify Bababalouk and the other black eunuchs that there remained not an ell in all Babylonian Iraq.

While these preparations were going forward, Carathis, to ingratiate herself still further with the powers of darkness, gave a number of little suppers to which she invited those women most famed for their beauty, above all taking care to select the fairest and most delicate. Nothing could have been more elegant than these suppers; but when the spirits of the company were at their height her eunuchs would set vipers crawling under the table and empty vases of scorpions there. One may well imagine that a wonderful amount of biting went on. Carathis seemed not to notice anything, and no one dared move. But when she saw that her guests were at the point of death she amused herself by dressing several of the wounds with a balsam of her own making; for this good princess abhorred idleness.

Vathek was less energetic than his mother. He passed his time indulging his senses in the Palaces devoted thereto, and was no longer seen either at the Divan or at the Mosque. And while one half of Samarah followed

his example the other groaned at the progress of corruption.

Meanwhile an embassy, sent to Mecca in more pious times, returned. It was composed of the most reverend mullahs, who had perfectly fulfilled their mission and had brought back one of those precious brooms which had been used to sweep the sacred Caaba—a gift truly worthy of the greatest prince of the earth.

At the moment of their return the Caliph was engaged in a place in no respect suitable for the reception of ambassadors. Outside the doors he heard the voice of Bababalouk, crying: 'Behold the excellent Edris Al Shafei and the seraphic Mouhateddin who bring with them the broom of Mecca, and who, with tears of joy, ardently desire to present it to your Majesty.' 'Let this broom be brought here,' said Vathek; 'perhaps we can find a use for it.' 'What!' replied Bababalouk, beside himself. 'Obey,' returned the Caliph, 'for it is my supreme wish to receive here and nowhere else these good people who have put you into such ecstasies.'

The eunuch went away muttering and bade the venerable band to follow him. A holy joy manifested itself in the countenances of these worthy old men, and, though fatigued by their long journey, they followed Bababalouk

with an agility bordering on the miraculous. They filed through the imposing portals and were greatly flattered that the Caliph did not receive them, as he did ordinary people, in the audience-chamber. They were not long in reaching the interior of the harem, where, through rich curtains of silk, they seemed to make out beautiful large blue and dark eyes which flashed like lightning. Profoundly moved with respect and full of their heavenly mission, they went forward in procession towards some small corridors which seemed to lead nowhere, but which in reality led them to that little cell where the Caliph awaited them.

‘Is the Commander of the Faithful sick?’ said Edris Al Shafei to his companion in a low voice. ‘Without doubt he is at his prayers,’ answered Al Mouhateddin. Vathek, who had overheard this dialogue, then shouted to them: ‘What does it matter to you where I am? Come forward still.’ Having said these words he put out his hand from behind the curtain and asked for the sacred broom. They all prostrated themselves respectfully, as well as the limited size of the corridor would permit, and even succeeded in forming quite a good semicircle. The venerable Edris Al Shafei drew the broom from the embroidered and perfumed wrappings which covered it up

from the sight of the vulgar, and, leaving his companions behind him, went pompously forward towards the supposed oratory. But what surprise and horror did he feel when Vathek, with a mocking laugh, snatched the broom from his trembling hand and proceeded to brush away some cobwebs which were hanging from the azure-coloured ceiling, leaving not one behind.

The old men, thunderstruck, did not dare to raise their beards from the ground. They saw all (for Vathek had carelessly drawn the curtain which separated them from him), and bathed the marble floor with their tears. Al Mouhateddin swooned with chagrin and fatigue, while the Caliph, letting himself fall back on his couch, laughed and clapped his hands without mercy. 'My dear black,' said he at last to Bababalouk, 'take these good people away and regale them with my Shiraz wine. Since they may now boast that they know my palace better than any one else we cannot do them too much honour.' With these words he threw the broom back at them and went away to enjoy the jest with Carathis. Bababalouk did everything in his power to console the old men, but two of the weakest died on the spot; the others, no longer wishing to look upon the light of day, took to their beds and never arose again.

The following night Vathek and his mother climbed to the top of the tower to consult the stars about the coming journey. The constellations were most favourable, and the Caliph, wishing to celebrate such a propitious augury, supped gaily on the platform, still black from the fearsome sacrifice which had taken place there. During this repast great bursts of laughter were heard reverberating through the air, which he took as a very happy omen.

In the palace everything was in movement. All night long the lights were kept burning; the noise of hammers and anvils, the voices of the women and their guards, who sang as they sewed, broke in on the silence of nature and gave infinite pleasure to Vathek, who imagined himself already mounting the throne of Suleiman in triumph. No less happy were the populace, and every man lent a hand to the work to hasten on the moment which should deliver them all from the tyranny of such a strange master.

The day before the departure of this insensate prince Carathis judged it expedient to renew her good advice. She kept repeating the commands of the mysterious parchment, which she had learnt by heart, and above all counselled Vathek not to enter any house whatsoever

during his journey. 'I well know,' said she, 'that thou art partial to fine meats and good looks, but content thyself with thine own cooks, who are the best in the world, and remember that in thy travelling harem there are at least three dozen pretty faces from which Bababalouk has never yet lifted the veil. Were it not necessary for me to remain behind, I myself would watch over thy conduct. I would fain see this Subterranean Palace with its treasures: there is nothing I love so much as caverns; I have a decided taste for mummies and corpses, and I wager that thou wilt find the best things of this kind. Do not then forget me, and as soon as thou hast gained possession of the talismans which will give thee empire over the precious metals and open for thee the centre of the earth, do not fail to send a confidential genie to fetch me and my retinue. I will bring the oil of the serpents which I have crushed to death as a graceful present for the Giaour, to whom such dainties must appeal.'

When Carathis had finished this excellent discourse the sun sank behind the Mountain of the Four Springs, and gave place to the moon. This star, then at its full, seemed abnormally large and beautiful to the women, eunuchs, and pages, who were agog to set forth. The town resounded to fanfares and shouts of joy. On all

sides plumes waved on the pavilions, and aigrettes shone in the soft light of the moon. The great square was not unlike a parterre of the most beauteous tulips of the Orient.

The Caliph, dressed in ceremonial garb and supported on either hand by his Vizier and Bababalouk, descended the great staircase of the tower. The whole multitude prostrated themselves, and the richly laden camels knelt ready for departure. It was a magnificent spectacle, and the Caliph himself stopped to drink it in. A respectful silence reigned, but this was somewhat marred by shouts from the eunuchs in the rear, who, discovering that certain impudent fellows had taken advantage of the fact that some of the cages containing the ladies were leaning too much on one side, and had thereupon clambered in, were turning them out apace and handing them over to the tender mercies of the seraglio surgeons.

The majesty of this dignified scene was not, however, seriously disturbed by such trifling events. Vathek paid homage to the moon with an air of intelligence; and the doctors of the law were scandalized by this idolatry, as were the viziers and the eminent men who had gathered to bask in the last rays of their Sovereign's countenance. At last, from the summit of the tower the clarions and

trumpets gave the signal for departure. Though these instruments were perfectly in accord a disharmony was apparent, caused by Carathis, who was singing hymns to the Giaour to a bass accompaniment from the mutes and negresses. Many good Mussulmans, thinking that these sounds proceeded from those nocturnal insects which presage evil, besought Vathek to beware lest harm should befall his sacred person.

The great standard of the Caliphate was raised on high; twenty thousand lances shone as one, and the Caliph, majestically treading under foot the cloth of gold which was spread in his passage, entered his litter amid the acclamations of his subjects. Then the procession started on its way in a silence so profound that the very grasshoppers could be heard chirping in the herbage of the Plain of Catoul. A good six leagues were traversed before dawn, and the morning star was still shining in the heavens when this great cortège arrived at the banks of the Tigris, where tents were pitched and a halt was called for a day's repose.

Three days passed thus without event. On the fourth the angry heavens burst into flames, the thunder rolled and crashed with fearsome violence, and the trembling Circassians, in their terror, embraced their horrid guar-

dians. The Caliph began to regret the Palaces of the Senses and would have been glad to take refuge in the large town of Ghulchissar, whose Governor had come to offer him refreshment; but, having consulted his tablets, he allowed himself to be drenched to the bone, despite the persuasions of his favourites, for he was anxious to do nothing which should imperil the success of an enterprise so dear to his heart; and he kept up his courage by the strength of his hopes. Soon the cortège lost its way, and the geographers were summoned to determine the position; but their maps were soaked and in as piteous a state as their persons. No long journey had been made since the days of Haroun al-Raschid, and no one knew which path to take; for Vathek, though he knew his way among the celestial bodies, was at a loss as far as the earth was concerned. He growled louder than the thunder, and from time to time dropped the word 'gallows', which fell by no means pleasantly on literary ears. At length, determined to follow his own ideas henceforward, he gave orders to cross some steep rocks and take a road which he thought should lead to Rocnabad in three days. Remonstrances were in vain: his mind was made up.

So forbidding did the chasms and the mountains appear that the eunuchs and women, who had never beheld

anything like this, raised piteous cries when they saw the horrible precipices which yawned beside the narrow path. Before the cavalcade had reached the top of the highest crag night fell, and, to make matters worse, a violent wind tore the curtains of the palanquins and cages to ribbons and left the unhappy women exposed to the full fury of the storm. The blackness of the heavens increased the terror of this disastrous night, and the air was filled with the caterwauling of pages and the weeping of girls.

As a finishing touch to these misfortunes the travellers now heard frightful roarings, and soon flaming eyes could be seen in the depths of the forest—eyes which could only belong to devils or to tigers. The pioneers (who were clearing a road as best they could) and part of the advance-guard were devoured before they knew where they were. The utmost confusion reigned; wolves, tigers, and other carnivorous animals, encouraged by the success of their companions, gathered round from all quarters. Everywhere was the sound of crunching bones, and the air was filled with the dread flapping of wings which announced that the vultures had come to share in the carnage.

At last the panic spread to the great body of the troops,



who were in attendance on the Monarch and his harem, two leagues in the rear. Vathek, ministered to by his eunuchs, was so far unaware of anything untoward—and was, in fact, luxuriously stretched on silken cushions in his roomy litter, while two little pages, whiter than the enamel of Franguistan, kept the flies from troubling him as he lay in a deep sleep, dreaming of the treasures of Suleiman. He was suddenly awakened by the cries of his wives, and, instead of the Giaour with the golden key he saw Bababalouk in a state of the utmost consternation. ‘Sire!’ cried this faithful servant of the most powerful of monarchs, ‘the most terrible disaster has overtaken us; fierce beasts, which would have no more respect for you than for a dead ass, have fallen on your camels. Thirty of the most richly laden have been devoured, with their drivers; the same fate has overtaken your bakers, your cooks, and those who have charge of your victuals, and unless our Holy Prophet extends his protection to us we shall eat no more for the rest of our lives.’ At this word, ‘eat’, the Caliph lost all self-control and fell to bellowing and striking himself great blows. Bababalouk, seeing that his master had altogether lost his head, stopped his ears so as at least to avoid the hubbub of the harem; and as the darkness became more intense and the uproar

every moment worse, he played an heroic part. 'Come, ladies and brothers,' shouted he with all his might, 'let us have light as soon as possible! Never shall it be said that the Commander of the True Believers was made a meal for infidel beasts!'

Though there were not wanting capricious and untractable spirits among these beauties they were all manageable enough on this occasion. In the twinkling of an eye lights appeared in all the cages. Ten thousand torches were at once lighted, and every one, including the Caliph, armed himself with great flambeaux. Tow dipped in oil and flaming on the ends of long sticks threw such a brilliant light that the rocks stood out as clearly as though it were day. The air was full of clouds of sparks, and these, driven before the wind, set fire to the ferns and undergrowth. Very soon the fire had got a firm hold on the forest, and snakes were seen gliding from their retreats with dreadful hissings. The horses, their noses to the wind, whinnied, stamped, and shied wildly.

Then the cedar forest which grew by the path took fire and the overhanging branches set alight the fine muslins and cloths which covered the cages of the women, so that the occupants were obliged to jump out at the risk of breaking their necks. Vathek, spitting out a thousand

blasphemies, was forced, like the others, to put his sacred feet to earth.

Never before had such a thing occurred. The ladies in their bewilderment fell about in the mud, in their chagrin, shame, and rage. ‘Must *I* walk!’ said one. ‘Must *I* wet my feet!’ said another. ‘Must *I* soil my garments!’ cried a third. ‘Abominable Bababalouk!’ cried all together. ‘Filth of hell! What need was there of torches? It would have been better to have been devoured by tigers than to find ourselves in this sorry plight! Now we are ruined for evermore. There is not a porter or camel groom in the army who will not be able to boast that he has seen some portion of our persons, and, worse still, our faces!’ So saying, the most modest among them buried their faces in the ruts of the road. The bolder ones loaded Bababalouk with reproaches; but he, knowing their ways, and being a man of discretion, fled with his companions as fast as their legs would carry them, flourishing their torches and beating on their tymbals.

The conflagration gave forth as much light as the sun on the hottest of the dog-days and heat in proportion. What a surpassing horror was it to see the Caliph all bespattered like an ordinary mortal! Seeing that he was losing the use of his senses and could no longer go for-

ward, one of his Ethiopian wives (for his harem was of great variety) took pity on him, slung him bodily over her shoulder, and, seeing that the fire was gaining on them on every hand, set off at a great speed, despite the weight of her burden. The other ladies, to whom danger had soon restored the use of their limbs, followed as fast as they could, while last of all came the scurrying guards and the camel-drivers with their animals, jostling together in confusion.

At length they arrived at the place where the ferocious beasts had begun the carnage; but these animals had too much intelligence not to withdraw at the approach of so horrible a tumult; besides which they had already had a wonderful supper. Bababalouk, however, captured two or three of the fattest, which had stuffed themselves to such an extent that they could not move, and set to work to flay them in a competent manner. The crowd were now so far from the blaze that the heat was quite moderate and agreeable, so it was resolved to camp there for the night. The tattered hangings of the litters were gathered up, the remains left by the wolves and tigers were buried, and revenge was taken on some dozens of vultures which were too replete to fly away. Then, after the camels (which were tranquilly preparing sal-ammoniac) had

been counted, the ladies were installed in their cages again and the imperial tent was pitched on the least rugged spot available.

Vathek stretched himself on a mattress of down to recover from the jolting he had suffered when carried by the Ethiopian, who was certainly the most unruly mount it had ever been his misfortune to ride. With the rest his appetite returned, and he called for something to eat; but alas! the delicate rolls which they were wont to cook in silver ovens to please his royal palate, those rich cakes, those amber preserves, those flagons of the wine of Shiraz, those porcelain vases filled with snow, those grapes from the banks of the Tigris—all had disappeared! Bababalouk could offer him nothing but a fat roasted wolf, stewed vultures, bitter herbs, unwholesome mushrooms, thistles, and roots of mandragora which ulcerate the throat and lacerate the tongue. The only drink available consisted of a few phials of villainous brandy which the scullions had secreted in their sandals. It may well be imagined that such an abominable meal nearly drove Vathek to despair. He held his nose and made dreadful grimaces as he ate, yet he did tolerable justice to the viands and afterwards composed himself for sleep the better to aid the process of digestion.

Meanwhile, the clouds having dispersed, the sun shone with a burning heat, and its rays, reflected from the rocks, roasted the Caliph despite his curtains, and he was bitten severely by a swarm of foul, absinthe-coloured gnats. He awoke with a start, irritated beyond words and not knowing what to do, though he racked his brains to think of some relief, while Bababalouk continued to sleep though he was covered with these villainous insects, which walked over his very nose. The little page-boys had thrown away their fans and were half-dead with torment. They used what breath they had to load the Caliph with bitter reproaches, and so for the first time in his life he heard the truth.

Then he renewed his imprecations against the Giaour, and even began to say some propitiatory words to Mahomet. 'Where am I?' he cried. 'What terrible rocks and sombre valleys are these? 'Have we arrived at the fearsome region of Kaf? Perhaps the Simurgh will come and pluck out my eyes to requite me for having undertaken this impious expedition!' Raving thus, he looked out from his tent, but the landscape he saw was in no wise consoling. On one side, as far as the eye could reach, stretched a plain of black sand and on the other rose unscaleable cliffs, all covered with those abominable thistles which

had already cruelly hurt his tongue. However, he thought he could see some huge flowers among the brambles and briars; but in this he was deceived, for they were nothing but rags remaining from the trappings of his magnificent cortège. There were several crevasses in the rock, and Vathek listened despairingly at their brinks, hoping to hear the noise of a torrent; but the only sound audible was the hollow murmuring of his people, who were cursing the journey and demanding water. Some there were who even came close to him and cried: 'Why have we been brought here? Has our Caliph another tower to build? Or is this the abode of the pitiless afrites whom Carathis loves so much?'

Hearing the word Carathis, Vathek bethought him of certain tablets she had given him, telling him to have recourse to them in any desperate emergency. While he was looking at them he heard a cry of joy and the sound of hand-clapping. The curtains of the pavilion opened and from it emerged Bababalouk, followed by a band of his favourites. With them walked two dwarfs, each only a cubit high, and each carrying a large basket filled with melons, oranges, and pomegranates. They chanted in silvery tones the following words: 'We dwell on the summit of these rocks in a cabin wrought of rushes and

canes; the eagles envy us our habitation; a little stream provides us with water for the Abdest, and never a day passes without our reciting the prayers which our Holy Prophet prescribes. We do reverence to you, O Commander of the Faithful! Our master, the good Emir Fakreddin, pays his devotion to you also, and reveres you as the Vicar of Mahomet. Small as we are, he has confidence in us; he knows that our hearts are as good as our bodies appear contemptible; and he has stationed us here to succour those who lose themselves among these dreary mountains. Last night we were engaged, in our little cell, in reading the Holy Koran, when suddenly a violent wind blew out our lights and made our dwelling tremble. Two hours rolled by in the profoundest darkness; then we heard from afar sounds which we took to be caused by the bells of a cafila crossing the rocks. Shortly afterwards we heard cries, roarings, and the sound of tymbals, and, frozen with fear, we imagined that the Deggial with his exterminating angels was coming to spread his plagues over the earth. Amid these reflections we saw the horizon illumined with blood-red flames, and in a few moments we were covered with sparks. Terrified by this spectacle, we knelt down, opened the book dictated by the Blessed Intelligences, and, by

the light of the surrounding fire, we read the verse which runs: *Man must trust in the mercy of Heaven alone; there is no aid save in the Holy Prophet; the Mountain of Kaf itself may tremble, and only the power of Allah is unshakable.* Having pronounced these words, a heavenly calm took possession of our souls. Profound silence reigned and our ears distinctly heard in the air a voice which said: "Servants of my faithful Servant, put on your sandals and go down into the happy valley where dwells Fakreddin; tell him that a most happy opportunity of satisfying his thirst for hospitality now presents itself: it is the Commander of the True Believers himself who is wandering among these mountains, and he must be succoured." Full joyfully did we obey this angelic behest; and our master, filled with pious zeal, gathered with his own hands these melons, these oranges, and these pomegranates. He is following after us with a hundred dromedaries, bearing the clearest water from his fountains; he comes to kiss the fringe of your sacred robe, and to beg you to enter his humble dwelling, which, like an emerald set in lead, lies hemmed in by these arid deserts.' The dwarfs, having spoken these words, stood with their hands crossed on their stomachs and preserved a deep silence.

While this fine harangue was in progress Vathek had

possessed himself of the basket, and long before the messengers had finished speaking the fruits had disappeared into his mouth. As he proceeded with his meal he became pious, recited his prayers, and called for the Koran and some sugar.

He was thus engaged when he caught sight of the tablets which he had taken out when the dwarfs appeared. Turning to them again, he well-nigh fell to the ground when he read, in large scarlet characters traced by the hand of Carathis, these words: *Beware of the old doctors and their little messengers who are no more than a cubit high; mistrust their pious deceptions; instead of eating their melons, thou must put those who bear them on the spit. If thou art so weak as to enter their dwelling the door of the Subterranean Palace will close against thee and crush thee with its weight. Thy body shall be spat upon, and the bats will make their nest in thine entrails.*

‘What is the meaning of this fearsome rigmarole?’ cried the Caliph. ‘Must I then die of thirst in these sandy deserts when I can refresh myself in the happy valley of melons and cucumbers? Accursed be the Giaour and his ebony portal! He has played fast and loose with me long enough; besides, who shall prescribe laws to *me*? I must not enter any one’s house, they say. What! Can I enter

any place which does not already belong to me?' Bababalouk, who had not missed a word of this soliloquy, applauded it with all his heart, and all the ladies agreed with him—a thing which had never happened before.

The dwarfs were caressed and placed neatly on little satin cushions. The whole retinue admired the symmetry of their little bodies, all of which they wished to see; and they were offered trinkets and sweetmeats, which, however, they refused with exemplary gravity. They clambered up the Caliph's dais and on to his shoulders, from which point of vantage they kept up a continual buzzing of prayers in both his ears. Their little tongues trembled like the leaves of the aspen, and Vathek was getting to the end of his patience when the acclamations of the troops announced the arrival of Fakreddin, with a hundred greybeards and as many Korans and dromedaries. Every one at once set about their ablutions and began to repeat the Bismillah. Vathek got rid of his importunate monitors and did likewise, for his hands were burning.

The good Emir, who was extraordinarily religious and a wonderful framer of compliments, delivered a harangue five times as long and five times less interesting than that of his little forerunners. The Caliph, who could

bear it no longer, cried: 'For the love of Mahomet! make an end, my dear Fakreddin, and let us go to your valley, there to eat of the rich fruits which Heaven has bestowed upon you.' At these words they set forth, and the old men were proceeding somewhat slowly; but Vathek had surreptitiously ordered the little pages to goad the dromedaries. The prancings of these animals and the distress of their venerable riders were so amusing to the feminine occupants of the cages that they gave vent to loud bursts of laughter.

However, they all made their way down into the valley by large flights of steps which the Emir had had made in the rock, and soon they began to hear the murmuring of streams and the rustling of leaves. The cavalcade soon filed into a path bordered by flowering shrubs, which ended in a great wood of palm-trees whose branches overshadowed a huge building of freestone. This edifice was surmounted by nine domes and adorned with as many portals of bronze, on which were enamelled these words: *This is the pilgrims' refuge, the travellers' resting-place, and the repository of the secrets of all countries of the world.*

At each door stood nine pages, beautiful as day and fittingly clothed in long garments of Egyptian linen. They received the company with an easy and pleasant air.

Four of the most amiable installed the Caliph on a magnificent tecthrevan; four others, a little less gracious, took charge of Bababalouk, who leapt for joy when he saw the pleasant quarters which he was to have: and the rest of the retinue were looked after by the other pages.

When everything of the male sex had disappeared the door of a large enclosure on the right opened on well-oiled hinges and there came forth a young person of slender form, whose fair hair was allowed to hang loose so that the evening zephyrs could play with it at their will. A band of girls, like the Pleiades, followed her on tiptoe. They ran to the pavilions where sat the sultanas, and the young woman bowed gracefully and said: 'Charming princesses, you are expected: we have prepared the beds of slumber and have strewn each chamber with jasmine. No insects shall drive sleep from your eyelids, for we will fan them away with a million plumes. Come then, sweet ladies, and lave your delicate feet and ivory limbs in baths of rose-water; and by the gentle light of perfumed lamps your servants will tell you stories.' The sultanas were very pleased to accept these kind ministrations and followed the young woman into the Emir's harem; but there we must leave them for a moment, to return to the Caliph.

That prince had been conducted beneath a great dome, lit by a thousand lamps of rock-crystal. As many vases of the same material, filled with a delicious sherbet, sparkled on a great table spread with a profusion of delicate viands. Among others there were rice cooked in milk of almonds, saffron soups and lamb *à la crème*, all of which were favourite dishes with the Caliph. He ate of them to excess, showed great friendship for the Emir in the gaiety of his heart, and made the dwarfs dance despite their unwillingness, for they dared not disobey the Commander of the Faithful. At last he stretched himself out on the sofa and slept more tranquilly than he had ever done in his life.

Under the dome a peaceful silence reigned, uninterrupted save by the chewings of Bababalouk, who was making up for the sore fast which had been enforced on him in the mountains. As he was in too good a humour to sleep and hated idleness, he thought he would go at once to the harem to look after the ladies—to see if they had been properly anointed with the balm of Mecca, whether their eyebrows and their tresses were in order, and, in a word, to render them any little service of which they might stand in need.

For a long time he unsuccessfully sought the door lead-



ing to the harem. He dared not shout, for fear of wakening the Caliph, and no one was astir in the palace. He was beginning to despair of being able to carry out his plan, when he heard a low whispering. It came from the dwarfs, who had returned to their old occupation, and were re-reading the Koran for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time in their lives. They very politely invited Bababalouk to listen to them, but he had something else to do, and so, though somewhat scandalized, they showed him the way to the apartments he sought. To get there he had to pass through many very dark corridors, and, feeling his way along them he came at last to the end of a long passage, where he began to hear the pleasant chattering of the women, which rejoiced his heart. 'Aha! so you are not yet asleep!' he cried, striding ahead. 'Don't imagine that I have given up my duties.' Two black eunuchs, hearing such loud speech, hastily came forward with sabres in their hands; but soon every one was shouting: 'It 's only Bababalouk! It 's only Bababalouk!'

This vigilant guardian advanced towards a curtain of rose-coloured silk through which shone a pleasant light, by which he could see a large oval bath of dark porphyry. Through the half-open heavy curtains which fell in great folds around this bath, he could descry groups of young

slaves, among whom he recognized some of his own charges, sweetly stretching out their arms as though to embrace the perfumed water and refresh themselves after their fatigues. The languorous glances, the little whisperings, the enchanting smiles which accompanied the little confidences, the sweet odour of roses—all this created an atmosphere of voluptuousness which even Bababalouk had difficulty in resisting.

However, he maintained a very serious demeanour, and in a majestic manner ordered these beauties to leave the bath and thoroughly comb their hair. While he was giving these orders Nouronihar, the Emir's young daughter, as graceful as a gazelle, and full of mischief, signalled to one of her slaves to lower very quietly a large swing which hung by silken cords from the roof. While this was being done she made signs to the women in the bath, who, very vexed at having to leave their delightful pastime, tangled their hair so as to give Bababalouk more work, and plagued him in a thousand other ways.

When Nouronihar saw that his patience was nearly at an end, she came up to him with an assumed respectfulness and said: 'Lord, it is not fitting that the chief eunuch of our Sovereign the Caliph should stand; deign then to rest your graceful person on this sofa, which will break

of its own accord out of chagrin if it misses the honour of receiving you.' Charmed by this flattering address, Bababalouk answered gallantly: 'Delight of my eyes, I accept the offer which glides from your honied lips; and, to speak the truth, my senses are clouded by my admiration for the radiant splendour of your charms.' 'Rest, then,' replied the lovely Nouronihar, guiding him to the supposed sofa—which at once moved off like a flash. Then all the women, seeing what was afoot, clambered naked out of the bath and set to work pushing the swing with a will; till in a few moments its orbit extended from one side to the other of a very high dome, and Bababalouk quite lost his breath. At one moment he skimmed the water, at the next his nose nearly touched the glass of the roof, and the shrieks of laughter drowned the cries which he emitted in a voice like the sound of a broken pot.

Nouronihar was intoxicated with youthful delight. She was well accustomed to the eunuchs of ordinary harems, but she had never seen one so disgusting or so royal, and so she enjoyed the sport more than the others. At last she began to parody some Persian verses, and chanted: "Sweet white dove, floating through the air, cast a glance on thy faithful mate. Warbling nightingale, I am thy rose; sing me some melodious verses."

The sultanas and slaves, revelling in the jest, plied the swing with such force that the cord broke and poor Bababalouk fell like a turtle to the bottom of the bath. There was a general scream, and all the women quickly made good their escape through twelve little doors which had hitherto been unperceived, having first piled all their towels on his head and put out the lights.

The wretched animal, struggling in the darkness, up to his neck in water, could not rid himself of the pile of linen which had been thrown over him, and his chagrin was increased by the peals of laughter which were audible from all sides. He struggled in vain to get out of the bath: the side was all slippery with the oil from the broken lamps, and so he slid back every time with a hollow splash which resounded from the dome. At each fresh essay the cursed peals of laughter redoubled. Believing that the place was inhabited by demons instead of women, he at length decided not to make any more attempts, but to remain miserably in the bath. He vented his ire in soliloquies mainly composed of imprecations, not a word of which was lost on the malicious women, who lay carelessly stretched on their couches, listening to the fun. In this pretty state morning found him, and he was finally hauled out from beneath his mountain of

linen, half-smothered and soaked to the bone. The Caliph had caused search to be made for him everywhere, and when he did appear he limped into the presence with chattering teeth. When Vathek saw him he cried: 'How camest thou into this state? Who has soused thee thus?' 'And you,' replied Bababalouk, 'how came you into this accursed place? Is it meet for a monarch such as you to force himself and his harem on a dotard of an Emir who does not know how to live? See the charming girls he has here! Can you believe it, they have soaked me like a crust of bread, and have made me dance the whole night on their cursed swing, like an acrobat. This is a fine example for your wives, whom I have trained in such decorum!'

Vathek, not understanding a word of this harangue, insisted on a full account of what had happened. But instead of condoling with the poor devil, he was consumed with laughter at the thought of what a figure the eunuch must have cut on the swing. Bababalouk was so incensed at this that he came near to forgetting the proper respect due to his master. 'You may laugh, Sire,' said he, 'but I only wish this Nouronihar may play you some trick also; she is quite mischievous enough not to spare even you.' These words made no great impression on the Caliph at the time, but he remembered them later.

While they were talking thus, Fakreddin came on the scene to call Vathek to solemn prayers, and to ablutions which were carried out in a vast meadow watered by countless streamlets. The Caliph found the water cool, but the prayers bored him to death. He amused himself, however, in watching the crowd of calenders, santons, and dervishes who were passing to and fro across the meadow. Above all he was amused by the Brahmins, the fakirs, and other bigots, who had come from India, and had broken their journey at the Emir's palace. They all had some particular eccentricity. One dragged a long chain; another an orang-outang; others were armed with scourges, and all carried out their various mummeries with great efficiency. Some climbed trees, others held up one foot in the air, others again balanced themselves over a small fire, or scourged themselves pitilessly. There were some also who harboured vermin, which were by no means unwilling visitors. These perambulating bigots exasperated the dervishes, calenders, and santons. They had been assembled in the hope that the presence of the Caliph would cure them of their madness and convert them to the Mussulman faith: but alas! they were greatly deceived. Instead of preaching to them, Vathek treated them as buffoons, told them to present his compliments

to Vishnu and Ixhora, and took an especial fancy for a stout old man from the Isle of Serendib who was the most ridiculous of all. 'For the love of thy gods,' said he to this dotard, 'do some tricks to amuse me.' The old man, offended, began to weep, and, as he was a sorry weeper, Vathek turned his back on him. Bababalouk, who was in attendance on the Caliph with a parasol, then warned him to beware of this rabble. 'What a devil of an idea,' said he, 'to gather this crowd together! Must a great monarch be regaled with such a spectacle, with interludes by talapoins more mangy than the dogs? If I were you, I would order a great fire and purge the earth of the Emir, his harem, and his whole menagerie.' 'Silence,' answered Vathek. 'All this gives me infinite diversion, and I will not leave the meadow until I have seen all the animals that inhabit it.'

As the Caliph walked, all kinds of pitiful objects were presented to him; blind and half-blind men, men without noses, women without ears, and all to extol the great charity of Fakreddin, who, with his dotards, distributed poultices, and salves broadcast. At midday there entered a superb band of cripples and the finest possible collection of the infirm was now assembled in the meadow. The blind led the blind, feeling their way; the lame

hobbled together, and those deprived of an arm gesticulated with the one which remained. Beside a great waterfall were the deaf; those from Pegu had the largest and finest ears, and rejoiced in the accomplishment of hearing even less than the others. This place was also the haunt of those possessing superfluities, such as goitres, humps, and even horns, of which there were not a few displaying admirable polish.

The Emir was desirous of making a solemn celebration, and giving all possible honour to his illustrious guest. He therefore had spread many skins and cloths on the grass, and there were served pilaffs of all colours and other meats lawful for good Mussulmans to eat. Vathek, who was shamefully lax, had taken good care to order small portions of various abominable dishes, which scandalized the faithful. Soon all the holy assembly set to with a will. The Caliph was anxious to do likewise; and despite the protests of the chief eunuch he proposed to take his meal in that very place. So the Emir at once had a table placed in the shade of the willows. For the first course was served a fish caught in a river which ran over golden sands at the foot of a very high hill. These fish were cooked as soon as caught, and afterwards seasoned with fine herbs from Mount Sinai; for every-

thing connected with the Emir was as pious as it was excellent.

Just as the feast was drawing to a close, there suddenly burst forth a melodious sound of lutes, which the echoes took up over the whole hill-side. The Caliph, struck with astonishment and pleasure, raised his head, and a bouquet of jasmine fell on his face. A thousand bursts of laughter followed this prank, and through the thickets appeared a number of girls, leaping about like roebucks. The scent of their perfumed tresses reached Vathek, who stopped eating, and said to Bababalouk, like a man enchanted: 'Have the peris come down from their abodes? Seest thou that slender one, who so boldly runs on the brinks of precipices, and who, in turning her head, seems to pay no attention to anything but the gracious folds of her garment? With what a pretty impatience does she repel the grasping of the bushes! Could it be she who threw me the jasmine?' 'Oh yes, it was she, sure enough,' answered Bababalouk, 'and she would be minx enough to throw you down yourself from the rock to the bottom. I recognize her: she is my good friend Nouronihar, who so politely did me the honours of her swing. See, my good lord and master,' said he, breaking off a willow branch, 'let me go and chastize her for having been lack-

ing in respect towards you. The Emir can hardly complain; for, with all due respect to his piety, he has no right to keep a troop of young girls on the mountains; the keen air makes the thoughts too active.'

'Peace, blasphemer,' said the Caliph; 'speak not thus of her who carries off my heart over these mountains. Rather let my eyes gaze into hers, and let me breathe her sweet breath. With what grace and airiness does she run fluttering over these sylvan places!' Speaking thus, Vathek stretched out his arms towards the hill, and lifting his eyes in a wilder state of agitation than he had ever known before, he strained not to lose sight of her who had already captivated him. But her course was as difficult to follow as the flight of one of those beautiful azure butterflies of Kashmir which are so rare and so sprightly.

Vathek, not content with seeing Nouronihar, wished also to hear her speak, and greedily listened to try and distinguish her voice. At last he heard her whispering behind the little bush from which she had thrown the bouquet, and saying to one of her companions: 'I must admit that a Caliph is a good thing to look upon, but my little Gulchenrouz is much more lovable; one tress of his sweet hair is worth more than all the rich embroidery of the Indies; I had rather my finger were mischievously

bitten by his teeth than that it were enclosed by the most beautiful ring in the Imperial Treasury. Where did you leave him, Sutlememe? Why is he not here?’

The Caliph was uneasy at this speech, and would have liked to hear more, but she moved off with all her slaves. The amorous Monarch followed her with his eyes until she was lost to view, and remained like a bewildered traveller by night when the clouds suddenly veil the constellation which guides him. A curtain of shadow seemed to have descended before him; everything had lost its colour and changed its aspect. The sound of the streamlet inspired his soul with melancholy, and his tears fell on the jasmine which he had gathered into his burning bosom. He even picked up a few pebbles as souvenirs of a place where he had felt the first pangs of a passion greater than he had believed possible. Time after time he tried to go away, but in vain. A sweet languor consumed his soul. Lying beside the stream, he ceaselessly turned his gaze towards the bluish summit of the mountain. ‘Oh, pitiless rock,’ he cried, ‘what hidest thou? into what place has she departed? what passes in thy solitudes? Oh, Heaven! perhaps she is wandering in thy grottoes at this very moment with her happy Gulchenrouz!’

Meanwhile, the dews began to fall, and the Emir, uneasy for the health of the Caliph, had the imperial litter brought forward. Vathek let himself be taken away in it without knowing what he did, and was brought to the superb chamber where he had been received the evening before.

But let us leave the Caliph given over to his new passion, and follow Nouronihar over the rocks, where she had at last found her dear little Gulchenrouz. This Gulchenrouz was the only child of Ali Hassan, brother of the Emir, and was the most delicate and lovable creature imaginable. Ten years before his father had gone away to journey in unknown seas, and had confided him to Fakreddin's care. Gulchenrouz could write in different characters with remarkable exactitude, and painted the prettiest arabesques on vellum. His voice was sweet, and blended with the lute in the most moving fashion. When he sang the loves of Meignoun and Leilah, or other unfortunate lovers of those olden centuries, the eyes of all who listened were bathed in tears. His verses (for, like Meignoun, he was a poet) inspired a soft languor very dangerous for women. They all loved him wildly; and though he was thirteen years old his guardians had not yet been able to withdraw him from the harem. When

dancing he seemed as light as the down that flutters in the zephyrs of spring. But his arms, which interlaced so gracefully with those of the girls when he danced, could not fling the darts of the chase, nor tame the fiery horses which his uncle reared in his pastures. He was, however, a very good archer, and was capable of out-running all the other young boys if only any one had dared to break the silken bonds which bound him to Nouronihar.

The two brothers had mutually betrothed their offspring to one another, and Nouronihar loved her cousin more than her own eyes, very beautiful though these were. The children had all tastes and pastimes in common; both had long and languishing glances; their hair was of the same colour, and each was equally fair; and when Gulchenrouz donned his cousin's clothes he seemed even more feminine than she. If by any chance he quitted the harem for a space to visit Fakreddin, he did so with the timidity of a fawn separated from its mother. But for all that he had enough roguery in him to make game of the solemn greybeards; and sometimes they scolded him severely for it. On these occasions he would fling away passionately into the interior of the harem, drawing all the curtains after him, and take refuge, sobbing, in the

arms of Nouronihar—who loved his faults with an ardour which no virtue has ever been able to arouse.

After leaving the Caliph in the meadow Nouronihar frolicked with Gulchenrouz on the turf-carpeted mountains which protected the valley in which Fakreddin dwelt. The sun was setting, and the lively and exalted imaginations of the young people made them believe they saw, in the beautiful rosy clouds, the domes of Shaddukian and Ambreabad, where the peris have their habitation. Nouronihar was sitting on the hill-side, with the perfumed head of Gulchenrouz in her lap. But the unexpected arrival of the Caliph, and the splendour which attended him, had already made considerable impression on her passionate soul. Her vanity had left her no choice but to bring herself to this prince's notice. She had particularly noticed that he had picked up the jasmine which she had thrown him, and her self-conceit was thereby flattered. Also she was greatly troubled when Gulchenrouz took it into his head to ask what had become of the nosegay which he had gathered for her. Her only reply was to touch his forehead with her lips, after which she rose and paced the mountain side in an indescribable state of agitation and uneasiness.

Meanwhile night was falling: the pure gold of the set-

ting sun had given place to a glowing red, and its colours, like flames from a fiery furnace, lit up Nouronihar's burning cheeks. Poor little Gulchenrouz noticed it, and was moved to the depths of his soul to see his dear cousin so disturbed. 'Let us depart,' said he, in timid tones, 'there is something baneful in the heavens. These tamarind trees are trembling more than they are wont to do, and the wind chills my heart. Come, let us go in, for it is a very dismal evening.' So saying he took Nouronihar by the hand and used all the force of which he was capable to lead her away. She followed him without knowing what she did, for a thousand strange notions jostled themselves in her mind. She even passed a big clump of honeysuckle (which she greatly loved) without paying the least attention to it; but Gulchenrouz, though he was running as if a wild beast had been at his heels, could not resist gathering a few sprigs.

The girls, seeing them return so quickly, thought that as usual they wanted to dance. So they joined hands and formed a circle, but Gulchenrouz, out of breath, sank down on the grass. At this, consternation spread through the playful band. Nouronihar, almost beside herself, and as much fatigued by the tumult of her thoughts as by her hurrying, flung herself down beside him, took his

little icy hands to her warm bosom and soothed his brow with a sweet-smelling ointment. At last he came to life, and, burying his head in Nouronihar's robe, he begged her not to return yet to the harem. He was afraid of being scolded by Shaban, his tutor, a wrinkled old eunuch who was not the most amiable of persons. This crabbed old man would have been annoyed at his upsetting Nouronihar's usual airing. So the whole band sat down in a circle on the lawn, and played many childish games. The eunuchs took up a position some little way off and amused themselves together. Every one was quite happy, except Nouronihar, who remained thoughtful and down-cast. Her nurse perceiving this began to tell interesting stories, to which Gulchenrouz, who had already forgotten all his fears, listened with great delight. He laughed and clapped his hands, and played a hundred little pranks on every one, even including the eunuchs, whom he wished to incite to chase him, despite their age and decrepitude.

Meanwhile the moon arose, and so delightful was the evening that it was decided to take supper in the open air. One of the eunuchs hurried off to look for melons, while others shook the overhanging branches which rained down showers of sweet almonds on the happy

company. Sutlememe, who was expert in making salads, filled great porcelain bowls with the most delicate herbs, adding the eggs of small birds, curdled milk, lemon juice, and slices of cucumber, and served it round with a great spoon from Cocknos. But Gulchenrouz, as usual clasped in Nouronihar's arms, closed his little red lips when Sutlememe offered him a morsel; for he would take nothing save from the hands of his cousin, and he pressed her lips like a bee which intoxicates itself with the honey from a flower.

In the midst of the general gaiety a light was observed on the summit of the highest mountain. This light spread a soft brightness, and might have been taken for the rise of the moon at its full if that star had not been on the horizon. There was a general stir at this spectacle, and all sorts of conjectures were hazarded about it. It could not proceed from a conflagration, for the light was clear and bluish, nor had any one ever seen a meteorite of such a colour or such a size. At one moment this strange light became pale; at the next it grew stronger. At first it seemed fixed on the pinnacle of rock; then suddenly it moved from there and shone in a grove of palms; and from there, following the course of the torrents, it at last stopped at the entrance to a dark and narrow valley.

Gulchenrouz, whose heart quaked at anything unforeseen or unusual, began to tremble with fright, and, pulling Nouronihar by the dress, begged her to go back to the harem. The women counselled likewise; but the Emir's daughter, carried away by her curiosity, showed her desire to investigate the phenomenon at all costs.

While they were all arguing there came such a blinding flash that every one leapt back screaming. Even Nouronihar took a few steps to the rear, but she soon came forward again, and went quite near to the source of the light. The globe remained motionless in the valley, and burned there majestically, silently. Nouronihar, crossing her hands on her breast, hesitated for a few moments. The fright that Gulchenrouz had displayed, the deep solitude in which she found herself for the first time in her life, the imposing calmness of the night—all these things contributed to arouse her fears. Time after time she was on the point of turning back; but the luminous globe remained ever fixed before her; and, urged by an irresistible impulse, she made her way through the briars and brambles, brushing aside all natural obstacles.

As soon as she gained the valley she was overshadowed suddenly by thick darkness, and could see only a feeble glimmer, very far off. The noise of the waterfalls, the

rubbing of the palm-branches, the intermittent and funereal cries of the birds which haunted the trees there, all struck terror into her soul. Every moment she thought she had disturbed some venomous reptile with her feet. All the stories she had ever heard of malicious dives and sombre ghouls came into her head, and she stopped a second time: but once more her curiosity got the better of her and she boldly took a tortuous path which led towards the light. So far she had known where she was, but once on the path she was completely lost. 'Alas!' she cried, 'why am I not in those safe and well-lit rooms where evenings pass so pleasantly with Gulchenrouz! Dear child; how thou wouldst tremble wert thou like me in this deep solitude!' Thus meditating, she still pressed forward. Suddenly there appeared a number of steps cut in the rock; while the light became stronger and now appeared to be shining directly down upon her from the topmost point of the mountain. These steps she boldly climbed. When she had reached a certain height she perceived that the light appeared to issue from a sort of grotto, whence also came plaintive and melodious sounds, which resembled voices forming a species of chant, like the hymns sung over the tombs. At the same time a sound like that made when filling a bath became aud-

ible. She descried great flaming torches placed here and there in crevices in the rocks. All these things froze her blood, but nevertheless she still went upwards, revived somewhat by the strong and subtle odour which the torches exhaled, and came to the entrance of the grotto.

In a kind of ecstasy she gazed into its depths, and saw a huge golden vessel filled with a liquid which distilled on her face a gentle rain of the essence of roses. A sweet symphony sounded in the cavern; beside the vessel lay royal garments, diadems, and heron plumes, all glittering with carbuncles. While she was admiring this magnificence the music ceased and she heard a voice saying: 'For what monarch have these torches been lighted, this bath and these robes prepared, in a manner befitting not only the sovereigns of this world, but even those who guard the talismans?' 'It has been done for the beauteous daughter of the Emir Fakreddin,' said a second voice. 'What!' exclaimed the first, 'for that foolish girl who wastes her time with a frivolous child, sunk in effeminacy, who will never be anything but a pitiable husband!' 'What sayest thou!' answered the other voice. 'Is it possible that she can be amusing herself with such foolishness when the Caliph is burning with love for her; he, the Sovereign of the World, who is to enjoy the treasures

of the pre-Adamite sultans, a prince six feet tall, whose eye penetrates even to the marrow of young girls? No, she cannot reject a passion which would raise her to the highest glory. She will despise her childish plaything; and then all the riches which are in this place, as well as the carbuncle of Giamchid, will be hers.' 'I think thou speakest with reason,' said the first voice, 'and I go to Istakhar to prepare the Palace of Subterranean Fire to receive the Caliph and his bride.'

The voices died away, the torches were extinguished, the blackest obscurity succeeded the brilliant light, and Nouronihar found herself stretched on a sofa in her father's harem. She clapped her hands, and immediately Gulchenrouz and the women came running to her: they had been in despair at losing her and had sent the eunuchs searching for her in every direction. Shaban also appeared and sharply scolded her, saying: 'Saucy minx! Either you have a master-key to the harem, or else you have some jinn for a lover, who opens all doors for you. I intend to find out what your power is; go speedily into the room with two skylights, and don't expect to take Gulchenrouz with you. Come, now, make haste, Madame; I am going to lock you up securely.' At these threats Nouronihar haughtily tossed her head and gazed

open-eyed at Shaban with orbs which seemed to have grown larger since the dialogue in the mysterious grotto. 'Begone,' said she, 'speak thus to slaves; but pay proper respect to one who is born to give laws and subdue all men to her dominion.'

She was on the point of continuing in the same tone when a cry was heard: 'The Caliph is here! The Caliph is here!' Immediately all the curtains were drawn, the slaves prostrated themselves in a double row, and poor little Gulchenrouz hid himself under a dais. First came a file of black eunuchs trailing after them long robes of gold-embossed muslin; they bore fragrant censers which spread a sweet perfume of aloes. Then behind them gravely strode Bababalouk, who was none too pleased with the visit, and was shaking his head. Close behind him followed Vathek, magnificently apparelled. His bearing was noble and easy, and one would have admired his splendid aspect even had he not been the Sovereign of the World. He drew close to Nouronihar, and when he had fully met her radiant eyes, of which so far he had only got a glimpse, he was carried away. Nouronihar seeing this, cast down her glance at once, but her confusion only added to her beauty and still further inflamed Vathek's heart.

Bababalouk, a connoisseur in such matters, saw that the only thing was to make the best of a bad job, and signed to every one else to leave the apartment. While looking round to see that no one was hidden in any corner, he saw a pair of feet protruding from beneath the dais, so he pulled at them without ceremony; and, finding that it was Gulchenrouz, he hoisted him upon his shoulders and carried him off, covering him with countless odious caresses. The youngster struggled, his face as red as the pomegranate flower, and his tear-filled eyes sparkling with vexation. In his despair he darted such a meaning look at Nouronihar that the Caliph noticed it and said: 'Can this be your Gulchenrouz?' 'Sovereign of the World,' replied she, 'spare my cousin, whose innocence and sweetness should protect him from your wrath.' 'Be reassured,' answered Vathek, smiling; 'he is in good hands; Bababalouk loves children and always has a stock of sugar-plums and sweetmeats.' In her confusion, Fakreddin's daughter let Gulchenrouz be carried away without a word; but the heaving of her breast betrayed the agitation of her heart. Vathek was delighted with her, and gave way to the utmost transports of passion. He was meeting with but a feeble resistance when the Emir suddenly entered and threw him-

self at the Caliph's feet, with his forehead touching the ground. 'Commander of the Faithful,' said he, 'do not debase yourself to the level of your slave.' 'Nay, Emir,' replied Vathek, 'rather do I raise her to my level. I declare her my wife, and the glory of your family will be handed down from generation to generation.' 'Alas! Lord,' returned Fakreddin, tearing several hairs from his beard; 'cut short the days of your faithful servant rather than that he should be false to his word. Nouronihar is solemnly promised to Gulchenrouz, the son of my brother, Ali Hassan; their hearts are joined; their vows are plighted: it is impossible to break such sacred compacts.' 'What!' replied the Caliph brusquely, 'thou desirest to deliver this divine beauty to a husband more feminine than herself! Thou thinkest that I will allow her charms to wither in such cowardly and feeble hands! Nay! Mine are the arms in which she shall pass her life; such is my pleasure! Get thee hence, and do not disturb this night, which I devote to the adoration of her charms.' The Emir, in despair, then drew his sabre and presented it to Vathek, and, stretching out his neck, said in a steady voice: 'Lord, strike your unhappy host; he has lived too long when he has the pain of seeing the Vicar of the Prophet violate the holy laws of hospitality!' Nouronihar,

who had remained dumbfounded during this scene, could no longer endure the torment of the conflicting emotions which harried her soul, and fell down in a swoon. Vathek, divided between fear for her life and fury at having met with resistance, cried to Fakreddin: 'See to thy daughter!' and withdrew, after piercing the Emir with his terrible glance. That unhappy man at once collapsed, bathed in a deadly sweat.

Gulchenrouz, for his part, had escaped from Babababouk and came on the scene just at this moment. Seeing Fakreddin and his daughter both stretched on the ground he called as loudly as he could for aid, and did his best to revive Nouronihar with his caresses. Pale and breathless, he ceaselessly kissed the lips of his beloved; till at last the sweet warmth of his lips brought her back to life and she soon regained her senses.

As soon as Fakreddin had recovered from the Caliph's terrible glance, he sat up and looked around to see whether that dangerous prince had departed; and, finding that he had, summoned Shaban and Sutlememe to him. Taking them aside, he said: 'My friends, desperate cases require desperate remedies. The Caliph is bringing horror and desolation into my family; and I have no power to resist him. One more glance like the last will

send me to my grave. Give me some of that soporific powder brought me by a dervish from the Arracan, and I will administer to these young people a dose the effects of which will last three days. The Caliph will think they are dead. Then, feigning to bury them, we will carry them to the cavern of the venerable Meimoune, on the borders of the great sandy desert, near my dwarfs' hut; and when every one has departed, you, Shaban, with four chosen eunuchs, will bear them off to the vicinity of the lake, where you will have previously provided victuals sufficient for a month. We can reckon one day for surprise, five for tears, a fortnight for reflection, and the rest for the preparation to start on the march again. I think this will be all the time needed for Vathek, after which I shall be rid of him.'

'The idea is good,' said Sutlememe; 'we must turn it to best advantage. Nouronihar seems to me to be fond of the Caliph, so that you can be sure that as long as she knows he is here we shall not be able to keep her in the mountains, despite her affection for Gulchenrouz. Let us persuade her that she is really dead, and Gulchenrouz as well, and that both of them have been carried off to this rocky place in order to expiate the minor sins which love has led them to commit. We will tell them that we

have killed ourselves out of despair, and the strangeness of the effect will be completed by the dwarfs, whom they have never seen, and who will seem to be marvellous apparitions. The sermons they will deliver to the children will have a great effect on them, and I wager that everything will pass off most perfectly.' 'I think your notion a good one,' said Fakreddin; 'let us put the matter in train.'

The powder was at once sent for, and some of it was put in sherbet, which Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz unsuspectingly drank. An hour later they were in great pain and suffering from palpitation of the heart, and numbness seized all their limbs. Rising to their feet with difficulty, they painfully climbed the dais and lay down on the sofa. 'Give me warmth, dear Nouronihar,' said Gulchenrouz, embracing her closely; 'put thy hand on my heart: it has turned to ice. Ah! thou art as cold as I. Has the Caliph slain us both with his terrible glance?' 'I am dying,' answered Nouronihar in a stifled voice, 'press me close, that at least I may breathe out my soul upon thy lips.' The tender Gulchenrouz heaved a deep sigh; their arms relaxed and they spoke no more; both lay as though dead.

Then great cries resounded through the harem. Shaban

and Sutlememe feigned despair with much skill, while the Emir, annoyed at being reduced to these extremities, was making his first trial of the powder, and had no need to counterfeit affliction. All lights had been put out save two lamps which shed a sad radiance on the faces of these beautiful flowers, believed to have faded in the springtime of their lives; and the slaves, who had come in from all parts, stood silent witnesses of the spectacle. The funeral wrappings were brought; the bodies were washed in rose-water and laid in winding-sheets whiter than alabaster. Their beautiful tresses were entwined together and perfumed with the most exquisite essences.

The attendants were just about to place on the children's heads two crowns of jasmine, their favourite flower, when the Caliph, who had that moment heard of the tragic event, came on the scene. He was as pale and haggard as the ghouls which wander among the tombs at night. He was unmindful of himself and of the whole world in his grief, and, bursting through the slaves, he threw himself at the foot of the dais and, beating his breast, pronounced a thousand curses on himself as a vile assassin. But when he tremblingly lifted the veil which covered the pale countenance of Nouronihar he gave a great cry and fell as one dead. The chief eunuch

grimaced horribly and carried him off at once, saying: 'I foresaw that Nouronihar would serve him some ill turn.'

As soon as the Caliph had been removed, the Emir commanded the coffins to be brought, and forbade all entry into the harem. All doors were closed, all musical instruments broken, and the Imams began to recite their prayers. Tears and lamentations were redoubled on the evening following this dolorous day. As for Vathek, he grieved in silence. His attendants had been obliged to give him soothing remedies to calm the violence of his rage and grief.

At dawn the following day the great bolts of the palace gates were opened and the cortège set out for the mountains. The sad cries of 'Leillah-Illeilah!' were wafted to the ears of the Caliph, who strongly desired to mortify himself and follow in the funeral train. It would have been impossible to dissuade him had he been able to walk, but at the first step he fell, and had to be put to bed, where he remained several days in a state of torpor which struck pity even into the heart of the Emir.

When the cortège arrived at the cave of Meimoune, Shaban and Sutlememe dismissed the whole retinue. The four trusty eunuchs remained; and, after resting for a few moments near the coffins (into which air had now

been admitted), they bore them to the banks of a little lake fringed with greyish moss. This place was the resort of herons and storks, which constantly fished there for little blue fish. The dwarfs, instructed by the Emir, were not long in arriving, and with the aid of the eunuchs built huts of reeds and rushes, a task they carried out with wonderful skill. They erected also a store for the provisions, a little oratory for themselves and a pyramid of wood. This consisted of logs arranged with great exactitude, and served to provide the fuel very necessary in this cold mountain valley.

Towards evening two big fires were lit on the banks of the lake. The two beautiful forms were removed from their coffins and laid gently in the same hut on a bed of dry leaves. The dwarfs then began to recite the Koran in clear and silvery tones. Shaban and Sutlememe watched attentively a little way off, waiting with no little anxiety until such time as the effects of the powder should have worn off. At last Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz feebly stretched out their arms, and then opened astonished eyes on their unaccustomed surroundings. They even tried to rise, but were not strong enough, and fell back on their bed of leaves. Sutlememe at once made them swallow a cordial with which the Emir had provided her.



Then Gulchenrouz awoke completely, sneezed very hard, and got up with a start which betokened extreme surprise. When he got outside the hut he sniffed the air with great relish, and exclaimed: 'I can breathe, I can hear, I can see the firmament powdered with stars! I am still alive!' At the sound of this beloved voice, Nouronihar brushed herself clear of leaves and made haste to clasp Gulchenrouz in her arms. The long winding-sheets in which they were clad, their crowns of flowers, and their unshod feet were the first things she particularly noticed, and at this sight she covered her face with her hands and thought deeply. Through her mind passed visions of the enchanted bath, of her father's despair, and above all of the majestic figure of Vathek. She recollected that both she and Gulchenrouz had been ill and dying, but all these thoughts circled confusedly in her brain. This strange lake, reflecting the firelight in its placid waters, the pale shades of the earth, these curious huts, these sadly swaying rushes, these storks whose mournful note mingled with the voices of the dwarfs—all tended to convince her that the angel of death had opened the portal of some new existence.

Gulchenrouz, for his part, clung in mortal fear to his cousin, for he too believed that he was in the land of

spectres, and was terror-stricken by Nouronihar's silence. At last, 'Speak,' he said, 'where are we? Seest thou those spectres tending that ardent blaze? Are they Monkir and Nekir and will they cast us into the fire? Is this lake crossed by the fatal bridge, and does its apparent stillness hide a watery chasm through which we shall fall ceaselessly for centuries?'

'No, my children,' said Sutlememe, approaching; 'be reassured; the exterminating angel, who has led our souls after yours, has assured us that the punishment for your luxurious and voluptuous lives shall merely be that you will be condemned to spend long years in this melancholy place, where the sun scarcely shines and the earth produces neither fruits nor flowers. Here are those set to watch over us,' she continued, pointing to the dwarfs; 'they will provide for our necessities: for souls as earthy as ours still retain something of their gross terrestrial character. Your sole food shall be rice; and your bread shall be soaked in the fogs which roll over this lake without intermission.'

At this melancholy prospect the poor children burst into tears. They prostrated themselves before the dwarfs, who, admirably keeping up their part, delivered according to their custom a very fine and long sermon on the

sacred camel which should bear them to the paradise of the faithful after some thousands of years.

When this discourse was finished ablutions were made, and after praising Allah and the Prophet they supped and returned to their dry leaves. Nouronihar and her little cousin were very pleased to find that the dead were permitted to lie in the same hut. As they had had quite enough sleep they passed the rest of the night discussing what had passed, with many embraces for fear of ghosts.

The next morning dawned very dark and rainy, and the dwarfs climbed great posts set up as minarets and called every one to prayer. The whole congregation gathered, Sutlememe, Shaban, the four eunuchs, a few storks bored with fishing, and the two children. These last had dragged themselves languidly out of their hut, and, since their minds were keyed up to a high pitch of tender melancholy, they performed their devotions with fervour. That over, Gulchenrouz asked Sutlememe and the others how it came about that they had died in such an opportune moment for himself and his cousin. 'After your death we slew ourselves in despair,' replied Sutlememe. Nouronihar, who, despite all that had taken place, had not forgotten her vision, exclaimed: 'And what of the Caliph? Is he too dead from grief? Will he come

here?’ The dwarfs had been primed against this contingency, and answered gravely: ‘Vathek is damned beyond redemption.’ ‘I can well believe it,’ cried Gulchenrouz, ‘and I am heartily glad of it; for it is my belief that it is his horrible glance which has sent us here to eat rice and listen to sermons.’

A week rolled by in similar fashion by the lake-side. Nouronihar thought of the grandeurs which she had lost through her untimely death, and Gulchenrouz made prayers and wicker baskets with the dwarfs, who greatly pleased him.

While this scene of innocence was being enacted in the heart of the mountains, the Caliph was making quite another kind of scene at the Emir’s palace. No sooner had he regained his faculties than he cried, in a voice which made Bababalouk start: ‘Perfidious Giaour! It is thou who hast slain my dear Nouronihar; I renounce thee, and ask pardon of Mahomet. Had I been more virtuous he would have spared her.’ And to his attendants: ‘Come, bring me water for my ablutions, and let the good Fakreddin come hither, that I may make my peace with him and that we may pray together. Afterwards we will go and visit the tomb of the unfortunate Nouronihar. It is my will to become a hermit, and spend

the rest of my days in these mountains, to expiate my crimes.' 'And what will you have to eat there?' said Bababalouk. 'I know not,' answered Vathek; 'I will tell thee when I am hungry, which will not be for a long time, I think.'

The arrival of Fakreddin put an end to this conversation. As soon as Vathek saw him he flung his arms round his neck, bathed him in his tears, uttering such pious sentiments that the Emir wept for joy, congratulating himself inwardly on the admirable conversion which he had brought about. As may well be imagined, he dared not oppose the pilgrimage to the mountain; so the two installed themselves in their respective litters and set out.

Despite the careful watch which was kept on the Caliph, it was impossible to prevent him from scraping up a little of the earth on the place where Nouronihar was supposed to be buried. It was indeed only with great difficulty that he could be induced to leave the spot, and he swore solemnly that he would return there every day, which did not please Fakreddin at all. But he consoled himself with the reflection that the Caliph would not venture any further, and that he would content himself with saying his prayers in the grotto of Meimoune; apart from which the lake was so well hidden among rocks

that he did not believe it could possibly be found. Vathek's conduct confirmed the Emir in his feeling of security, for he kept his resolution exactly and returned from the mountain so devout and contrite that all the greybeards were in ecstasies about it.

Nouronihar for her part was not altogether so contented. Although she loved Gulchenrouz, and although she was left free to spend her time in his company in order to increase her affection, she looked upon him as a toy, which did not make less desirable the carbuncle of Giamchid. Sometimes she even had doubts as to her state, and could not understand how it was that the dead should have all the needs and all the caprices of the living. One morning, in order to enlighten herself on this point, she rose softly from her couch near Gulchenrouz, while every one was still asleep, and after giving him a kiss set out along the bank of the lake, which she found discharged itself under a rock, whose summit did not seem to her unscaleable. She at once climbed up as well as she could, and, seeing the open sky, began to run like a hind fleeing from the hunter. Though she leapt along as lightly as an antelope, she was obliged at last to sit down under some tamarinds to recover her breath. While she was turning matters over in her mind and thinking

that she recognized the place, suddenly Vathek appeared. This unhappy and morose prince had forestalled the dawn. When he saw Nouronihar, he stood stock still, not daring to draw near to this pale and trembling figure, still so charming to look upon. At last Nouronihar, half pleased and half disconsolate in mien, fixed him with her beautiful eyes and said: 'Lord, have you come here to eat rice with me and listen to sermons?' 'Beloved shade,' cried Vathek, 'you have the power of speech! You have still the same lovely form and radiant glance! Is it possible that one can touch you also?' Saying this, he embraced her with all his might, crying: 'But this is flesh and blood, full of sweet warmth and animation; what can this marvel mean?'

Nouronihar answered modestly: 'You know, Lord, that I died on the same night on which you honoured me with your visit. My cousin says that my death was caused by one of your glances, but I know not; they did not seem so terrible to me. Gulchenrouz died at the same time, and we were both transported into a most mournful country, where we fare very meagrely. If you also are dead and were coming to join us there, I pity you, for you will be deafened by the dwarfs and the storks. Besides, it is most annoying for you and me to have lost the

treasures of the Subterranean Palace, which were promised to us.'

At this mention of the Subterranean Palace, the Caliph stopped his caresses, which had already gone far enough, in order to get Nouronihar to explain what she meant. She then recounted her vision to him, and what had followed, and the story of her supposed death. She described the place of expiation from which she had escaped in such a manner as would have made him laugh, had he not been very seriously occupied. No sooner had she finished speaking than Vathek, taking her in his arms again, said: 'Come, light of my eyes; all is made clear. We are both of us full of life: your father is a rogue who has deceived us in order to separate us; and the Giaour, who so far as I can see, wishes us to travel together, is little better. But at all events we will not stay long in his fiery palace. I esteem your beautiful body more highly than all the treasures of the pre-Adamite sultans; and it is my wish to possess it at my ease and in the good air of heaven for many moons, before burying myself in the earth. Forget this little fool of a Gulchenrouz, and . . .'

'Oh, my lord,' interrupted Nouronihar, 'do him no harm!' 'No, no,' answered Vathek; 'I have already told you to fear nothing for him; he is too like a kneaded

lump of milk and sugar for me to be jealous of him. We will leave him with the dwarfs (who, by the by, are old acquaintances of mine); they are more fitting company for him than you are. For the rest, I will not return to your father's house again: I do not wish to hear him and his greybeards clamour in my ear that I am violating the laws of hospitality, as though it were not the highest honour for you to marry the Sovereign of the World, rather than a little girl dressed up as a boy.'

Nouronihar took no trouble to signify disapproval of so eloquent a discourse. She only wished that the amorous monarch had evinced rather more warmth about the carbuncle of Giamchid; but then she thought that would all come in good time, and so agreed to everything with a most engaging submission.

As soon as he judged it seasonable the Caliph called Bababalouk, who was sleeping in the cavern of Meimoune and dreaming that the ghost of Nouronihar had seated him on the swing again, and had given him such a shove that at one moment he soared above the mountains, and the next he almost touched the bottoms of the valleys. At the sound of his master's voice he awoke suddenly, and came running all out of breath, and then almost collapsed when he saw the very spectre of which he had

just been dreaming. 'Ah! Lord,' cried he, recoiling several paces and shading his eyes with his hand, 'do you dis-inter the dead? Do you also ply the trade of ghoul? But do not hope to eat this Nouronihar; after what she has made me suffer she would be quite wicked enough to eat you yourself.'

'Cease to be an idiot,' answered Vathek; 'thou wilt soon be convinced that what I hold in my arms is Nouronihar, most fresh and living. Go and set up my tents in a valley I have noticed near here: I will there fix my abode, with this lovely tulip whose colours I will soon restore. See to it that we are provided with everything necessary to enable us to live a voluptuous life until further orders.'

The news of this most vexatious incident was not long in coming to the Emir's ears. Despairing because of the ill-success of his stratagem he abandoned himself to grief and besmeared himself with ashes. His faithful greybeards did likewise, and his whole palace was given over to dreadful disorder. Everything was neglected; no more travellers were entertained, no more salves were made; and instead of the charitable activity which had reigned in this asylum, the inhabitants went about with faces a yard long. All was groaning and smearing of ashes. Meanwhile, Gulchenrouz, being unable to find his

cousin, was petrified with fear, and the dwarfs were no less surprised. Only Sutlememe, more clever than the rest of them, suspected from the first what had happened. Gulchenrouz was beguiled with the hope that he would find Nouronihar in some spot among the mountains where the earth, strewn with orange-blossom and jasmine, would provide a more pleasing couch than those of the huts, and where they could sing to the music of lutes and chase butterflies.

Sutlememe was in the full tide of these blandishments when one of the four eunuchs drew her aside, enlightened her as to Nouronihar's escape, and gave her the Emir's commands. She at once took counsel with Shaban and the dwarfs: after which they struck camp, boarded a shallop, and quietly sailed off. Gulchenrouz put up with everything, but when they came to the place where the lake debouched into the rock tunnel, and the boat sailed in and he found himself in complete darkness, he was seized with terrible fear and gave vent to piercing cries; for he thought that he was about to be damned without remission for having behaved to his cousin in a manner too like a living being.

While this was going on the Caliph and the queen of his heart were spinning out happy days. Bababalouk had

had the tents set up and had closed the two entrances to the valley with magnificent screens, lined with cloth from India, and guarded by Ethiopian slaves bearing drawn sabres. So as to maintain the turf in this happy enclosure in perpetual greenness, white eunuchs incessantly watered its whole extent with watering pots of vermilion. The air in the neighbourhood of the Imperial pavilion was wafted ceaselessly by the movement of pun-kahs. A tender light percolated through the muslin gauzes into this place of luxury, and there the Caliph enjoyed the charms of Nouronihar in full measure. Intoxicated with delights, he listened with transport to her beautiful voice and to the harmonies of her lute. For her part she was enraptured with his descriptions of Samarah and of his tower and the wonders to be found in it. Her chief delight lay in making him re-tell the adventure of the ball, and that of the crevasse and the Giaour standing beside his ebony portal.

In this fashion the days rolled by, and at nightfall the lovers bathed together in a large bathing-tank of black marble which admirably set off the whiteness of Nouronihar's flesh. Bababalouk, into whose favour the minx had been readmitted, took care that the most delicate repasts were served to them. There was always some new viand,



and he sought out for them at Shiraz a sparkling and delicious wine, encellared before the birth of Mahomet. In little ovens hollowed out of the rock were cooked milk loaves kneaded by the delicate hands of Nouronihar; and the bread thus made appealed so much to Vathek's palate that he quite forgot all the savoury dishes his other wives had made him. These poor neglected creatures were dying of chagrin at the Emir's.

The Sultana Dilara, who had hitherto been the favourite, took this neglect to heart with a poignancy in keeping with her strong character. During the time she was in favour she had imbibed Vathek's extravagant ideas, and was burning to see the tombs of Istakhar and the Palace of the Forty Columns. Also, brought up among magicians, she rejoiced to see the Caliph ready to devote himself to the fire-cult; and so the voluptuous and slothful life he was leading with her rival mortified her for two reasons. Vathek's fleeting period of piety had thoroughly alarmed her, but this was worse. She therefore took upon herself to write to Princess Carathis, informing her that everything was going amiss, that the conditions of the parchment had been flatly defied, that the party had eaten, slept, and made a disturbance in the house of an Emir whose sanctity was redoubtable, and that finally

there seemed no longer any likelihood that they would possess the treasures of the pre-Adamite sultans. This letter was given into the hands of two woodcutters who were felling timber in one of the great forests on the mountain, and who, knowing the shortest roads, arrived at Samarah in ten days.

The Princess Carathis was playing chess with Morakanabad when the messengers arrived. For some weeks she had abandoned the higher levels of the tower, because everything seemed in confusion among the stars when she consulted them as to the progress of her son. She had vainly repeated her fumigations and stretched herself on the roof in the hope of having mystic visions; she dreamt only of pieces of brocade, bouquets, and similar fooleries. This had cast her into a depression from which not all her potions could rescue her, and her last resource was Morakanabad, a good fellow, full of honest trust, but who in this company by no means felt himself on a bed of roses.

As no one had news of Vathek, a thousand absurd stories were current about him. It may well be imagined, therefore, with what eagerness Carathis broke the seal of the letter, and how great was her fury when she learnt of her son's lax behaviour. 'Oh!' she cried, 'either I perish

or he shall penetrate into the Palace of Fire! Let me perish in flames so that Vathek but reigns on the throne of Suleiman!' Thus exclaiming, she whirled about in so magical and so fearsome a manner that Morakanabad recoiled in terror. She gave orders for her great camel, Alboufaki, to be prepared, and for the hideous Nerkes and the pitiless Cafour to be summoned. 'I want no other escort,' she said to the Vizier; 'I travel on urgent business, and so, a truce to ceremony! You will govern the people and see that you pluck them well during my absence, for we are spending a good deal, and one never knows what may happen.'

The night was very black, and from the plain of Catoul blew an unwholesome wind which would have daunted the most intrepid traveller; but Carathis took great pleasure in everything baneful. Nerkes was of like opinion, and Cafour had a particular taste for pestilences. The next morning this pretty caravan, guided by the two woodcutters, halted at the side of a huge marsh which exhaled a mortal vapour which would have killed any animal but Alboufaki, who naturally drew in these malignant odours with relish. The peasants besought the ladies not to sleep in such a place. 'Sleep!' cried Carathis; 'the very idea of such a thing! I never sleep at any time except

in order to have visions; and my attendants are far too busy to close the one eye which remains to them.' The poor fellows, who were beginning to feel none too pleased at the company in which they found themselves, simply stared with gaping mouths.

Carathis and the negresses who were riding behind then dismounted, and, having divested themselves of all clothing but shifts and drawers, ran about hither and thither in the full heat of the sun, picking poisonous herbs, which grew in abundance along the edge of the morass. These stocks were laid in for the benefit of the Emir's family, or for any one who should offer the least hindrance to the journey to Istakhar. The woodcutters were half dead with fear at the sight of these three horrible phantoms, and found the company of Alboufaki none too much to their taste. Worse still, Carathis commanded them to resume the journey, though it was high noon and hot enough to scorch the very stones. In spite of all their protests she made them obey.

Alboufaki, who greatly loved solitude, sniffed and hung back whenever he became aware of any semblance of a dwelling, and Carathis, humouring him according to her wont, turned aside each time. For this reason the peasants were unable to procure a single bite of food on the

journey: the goats and sheep which Providence seemed to send into their path, and the milk of which would have somewhat refreshed them, fled at the sight of the hideous camel and his strange burden. Carathis herself had no need of ordinary food, having long since invented an opiate which sufficed for her, and which she shared with her beloved mutes.

At nightfall Alboufaki stopped short, and stamped his foot. Carathis knew all his tricks, and understood from this that she must be in the neighbourhood of a cemetery. And in fact by the pale light of the moon she soon descried a long wall, broken by a half-open gate, so high that she could drive Alboufaki in at it. Then the miserable guides, now at the last gasp, humbly begged Carathis, since she was in the right place, to bury them, and breathed their last. Nerkes and Cafour jested in their customary way about the foolishness of these people, and found the aspect of the cemetery greatly to their liking, and the tombs a joyful sight. There were at least two thousand of them on the slope of a hill. Carathis, too busy with the long view to notice this sight, however charming it might be to her, bethought herself how she might profit by her situation. She murmured to herself: 'Surely such a fine cemetery is haunted by the ghouls;

and they are not lacking in intelligence. And since I have let my fools of guides die through inadvertence, I will ask my way of the ghouls, and as a bait to them I will invite them to regale themselves with these fresh corpses.' After this wise monologue she spoke on her fingers to Nerkes and Cafour, telling them to go and knock at the tombs and make their pretty prattle heard within.

The negresses, delighted at this behest, and promising themselves much pleasure in the company of the ghouls, departed with triumphant mien, and fell to knocking, tap, tap, on the tombs. While they tapped, a dull sound was heard in the earth; the sands heaved up, and the ghouls, attracted by the freshness of the new corpses, came out from all around, with their noses in the air. They all collected before a marble coffin on which Carathis was seated, between the bodies of her unfortunate guides. This princess held her court with distinguished courtesy, and after having supped they talked business. She soon learnt what she desired to know, and there-upon showed anxiety to get under way again without losing any time. The negresses, who had begun affairs of the heart with the ghouls, besought her with all their fingers to wait at least until dawn; but Carathis, who was virtue personified and the sworn enemy of illicit

love and laxity, brushed aside their entreaty and, mounting Alboufaki, ordered them to get up also with all speed. She travelled four days and four nights without stopping. On the fifth she traversed mountains and half-burnt forests, and on the sixth she arrived before the great screens which hid from all eyes the voluptuous excesses of her son.

It was daybreak, and the sentinels were securely snoring at their posts; but Alboufaki's brisk trot awoke them abruptly, and, thinking that they saw spectres from the black abyss, they incontinently took to flight. Vathek was bathing with Nouronihar, listening to stories and making fun of Bababalouk, who was telling them. Alarmed by the cries of his guards he leapt out of the water, but he soon leapt in again when he saw Carathis. She and the negresses, still mounted on Alboufaki, advanced and tore the muslins and fine curtains of the pavilion to shreds. At this sudden apparition, Nouronihar, whose breast harboured some grains of remorse for her conduct, thought that the moment of heavenly vengeance had arrived, and clung lovingly to the Caliph. Then Carathis, without dismounting from her camel, and fuming with rage at the spectacle which offered itself to her chaste view, burst out into ungovernable fury.

‘Two-headed and four-legged monster!’ she cried; ‘what does all this fine conglomeration mean? Art thou not ashamed to be clasping this snip instead of the sceptres of the pre-Adamite sultans? Is this, then, the hussy who has made thee so foolishly defy the Giaour’s terms? Is it with her that thou art eating up precious time? Is this all the benefit thou art reaping from the fine learning I have given thee? Is this the goal of thy journey? Wrest thyself from the arms of this little simpleton; drown her in the water, and follow me.’

In his first fury Vathek was fain to eviscerate Alboufaki and stuff him with the negresses, and even with Carathis; but the ideas of the Giaour, of the Palace of Istakhar, of the sabres and talismans, suddenly broke in on his mind with the rapidity of a flash of lightning. He then addressed his mother in a civil, though determined tone: ‘Formidable lady, you shall be obeyed; but I will not drown Nouronihar. She is sweeter than the Myrabolan comfit; she fervently loves carbuncles, and especially the carbuncle of Giamchid, which has been promised to her. She will come with us, for I mean her to rest on the sofas of Suleiman; I can no longer sleep without her.’ ‘Very good,’ replied Carathis, dismounting from Alboufaki, whom she handed over to the care of the negresses.

Nouronihar, who had so far not released her hold on the Caliph, became somewhat reassured, and said tenderly to Vathek: 'Dear sovereign of my heart, I will follow you, if need be, further than Kaf, into the country of the afrites; I will not fear to climb for you up to the nest of the Simurgh, who, after Madame here, is the most awesome being that has ever been created.' 'Here is a girl of courage and knowledge,' said Carathis. Nouronihar certainly possessed both; but despite all her resolution she could not prevent herself from sometimes thinking of the graces of her little Gulchenrouz, and of the tender days she had spent in his company. Some tears which glimmered in her eyes did not escape the Caliph; and she even cried aloud inadvertently: 'Alas! my sweet cousin, what will become of you?' At these words Vathek knit his brow, and Carathis cried: 'What is the meaning of these grimaces; what did she say?' The Caliph answered: 'She heaved an unseasonable sigh for a little boy with languorous and sweet tresses, who loved her.' 'Where is he?' returned Carathis; 'I must make this pretty child's acquaintance; for' (she added, under her breath), 'before setting out I have planned to restore myself into the Giaour's good graces; and there could be nothing more appetizing to offer him than the heart

of a delicate child, given over to the first impulses of love.'

Vathek climbed out of the bath and commanded Bababalouk to re-muster the cortège, the women and the other furniture of his harem, and to make everything ready for departure in three days. Carathis, for her part, retired alone into a tent, where the Giaour amused her with encouraging visions. When she awoke she saw, at the foot of her couch, Nerkes and Cafour, who told her by signs that, having led Alboufaki to the banks of a little lake so that he might browse on a certain grey moss, passably poisonous in quality, they had seen bluish fish like those in the tank at the top of the tower at Samarah. 'Oho!' said she, 'I must go there at once! for by means of a simple spell I can make these fish speak. They will enlighten me on many things, and will tell me the whereabouts of this Gulchenrouz, on whose sacrifice I am absolutely determined.' So she set off forthwith, accompanied by her black followers.

Since they travel quickly who do ill, Carathis and her negresses were not long in arriving at the lake. They burned magic drugs, which they always carried about with them, and, having stripped themselves naked, waded into the lake up to their necks. Nerkes and Cafour bran-

dished flaming torches, while Carathis pronounced barbarous words. Then all the fish put their heads out of the water, which they churned up wildly with their fins; and, urged by the power of the charm, they opened pitiable mouths and said with one voice: 'We are devoted to you from head to tail; what do you want with us?' 'Fish,' said Carathis, 'I conjure you by your bright scales to tell me where this little Gulchenrouz is to be found?' 'On the other side of this rock, Madame,' they chorused: 'are you satisfied? *We* are by no means satisfied at having to keep our mouths thus open to the air.' 'Yes,' answered the princess, 'I can well perceive that you are not used to long speeches, so I will leave you in peace, though I have many other questions that I should like to ask you.' At these words the water became calm and the fish disappeared.

Carathis, full of her malicious plans, at once climbed the rock, and saw the gentle Gulchenrouz asleep beneath a leafy shade, while the two dwarfs watched over him, muttering their orisons. These little people had the gift of perceiving when any enemy of good Mussulmans drew near; and so they became aware of Carathis, who, stopping short, said to herself: 'How prettily his little head is laid down! How languorous and pale he is! This

is precisely the child for my purpose.' The dwarfs interrupted these fine reflections by throwing themselves on her and scratching with all their might. Nerkes and Cafour at once came to their mistress's rescue, and pinched the dwarfs so hard that they gave up the ghost, praying to Mahomet to let his vengeance fall on this wicked woman and on all her family.

The noise made in the valley by this strange combat awoke Gulchenrouz, and he at once made a furious leap, climbed a fig-tree, and, gaining the top of the rock, ran for all he was worth. At length he fell like one dead into the arms of a good old genie, who cherished children and whose sole occupation was to protect them. This genie, going his rounds in the air, had pounced upon the cruel Giaour while he was muttering in his horrible crevasse, and had stolen the fifty boys who had been sacrificed to him through Vathek's impiety. He was bringing up these interesting beings in nests fixed above the clouds, and himself lived in a nest larger than all the others put together, from which he had driven the rocs who had built it.

These safe refuges were defended against the dives and afrites by floating pennants on which were written in golden characters the names of Allah and the Prophet.

When he arrived in this place, Gulchenrouz, who was still under the impression that he was dead, believed that he had come to the abode of eternal peace. He yielded to the caresses of his little friends without constraint. They had all collected in the venerable genie's nest, and vied with one another in kissing the smooth forehead and beautiful eyelids of their new companion. And there, far from the bickerings of earth, far from the sauciness of harems, the brutality of eunuchs, the inconstancy of women, he found his true place. Thus, happy in his companions, days, months and years rolled by in peaceful society; for the genie, instead of overwhelming his wards with vain knowledge and perishable riches, bestowed upon them the gift of perpetual youth.

Carathis, little used to seeing her prey escape her, flew into a frightful rage with the negresses, whom she accused of not having seized the child at once, and of having amused themselves with pinching to death the dwarfs, who were of no account. She returned to the valley, muttering, and, finding that her son had not yet arisen from his fair one's side, she vented her ill humour on him and Nouronihar. However, she consoled herself with the idea of setting out next day for Istakhar, and

there making the acquaintance of Eblis himself, through the good offices of the Giaour. But fate had ordered matters otherwise.

That evening, as she was in converse with Dilara, whom she had summoned to her, and who was a kindred spirit, Bababalouk came to tell her that the heavens appeared all enkindled in the direction of Samarah, and seemed to presage some calamity. She at once took her astrolabes and magical instruments, measured the height of the planets, made her calculations, and discovered, to her great displeasure, that a formidable revolt had broken out. Motavekel, profiting by the horror in which his brother was held, had stirred up the populace, taken possession of the palace, and was laying siege to the great tower, to which Morakanabad had retired with a few who still remained loyal. ‘What!’ cried she; ‘must I lose my tower, my mutes, my negresses, my mummies, and above all my laboratory, which has cost me so many hours of watching, without even knowing whether my fool of a son will win success in his venture! No, I will not be duped; I will set out at once to rescue Morakanabad by my redoubtable arts, and will rain down on the conspirators spikes and red-hot irons. I will open my magazines of serpents and torpedoes, which are in the

great vaults of the tower, and which will be enraged by hunger; and we shall see whether they will be able to hold out against such assailants.' Having thus spoken Carathis hurried to her son, who was quietly feasting with Nouronihar in his red pavilion. 'Glutton, that thou art,' cried she; 'if I were not here to watch over thee, thou wouldst soon be nothing more than the commander of the pies! Thy Believers have denied the allegiance they have sworn to thee; Motavekel, thy brother, reigns at this moment on the Hill of the Piebald Horses; and had I not certain little specifics in our tower, he would not loose his grip very quickly. But, so as to lose no time, my advice to thee will be short: strike thy tents, set out this very evening, and do not stop anywhere to trifle. Though thou hast infringed the conditions of the parchment I am still not without hope; for thou hast very prettily broken the laws of hospitality, in seducing the Emir's daughter, after having eaten of his bread and salt. This kind of behaviour cannot but please the Giaour; and if thou canst contrive to commit some further small crime on the way, all will go well, and thou wilt enter in triumph into the Palace of Suleiman. Farewell! Alboufaki and my negresses await me at the door.'

The Caliph had not a word to say in reply. He wished

his mother a good journey and finished his supper. At midnight camp was struck, to the sound of fanfares and trumpets; but the noise of tymbals was unable to drown the cries of the Emir and his greybeards, who had become blind with weeping and had lost every hair. Nouronihar, to whom this music gave pain, was most relieved when she was no longer within earshot of it. She and the Caliph rode together in the imperial litter, and they amused themselves by detailing all the splendours with which they would soon be surrounded. The other women jogged along sadly enough in their cages, but Dilara took consolation by thinking how she would celebrate the rites of fire on the venerable terraces of Istakhar.

Four days brought them to the smiling valley of Rocnabad. There spring was in full bloom; and the grotesque branches of the flowering almond-trees stood out against the azure of a sparkling sky. The earth strewn with hyacinths and jonquils exhaled a sweet perfume; thousands of bees, and nearly as many santons, had their dwelling there. Hives and oratories could be seen alternately ranged along the banks of the stream, their clean whiteness set off by the dark green of high cypresses. The pious hermits amused themselves by cultivating little

gardens, full of fruit, and above all, musk-melons, the best products of Persia. Sometimes they could be seen scattered about the meadow, amusing themselves by feeding peacocks whiter than snow and turtle-doves of azure blue. They were so engaged when the precursors of the imperial cortège cried with a loud voice: 'Denizens of Rocnabad, prostrate yourselves on the banks of your limpid streams, and give thanks to Heaven, which shows you a ray of its glory; for the Commander of the Faithful approaches!'

The poor santons, full of holy zeal, hastened to light candles in all the oratories, spread out their Korans on ebony reading-desks, and then came before the Caliph, bearing little baskets filled with figs, honey, and melons. Whilst they were advancing in procession, and with measured steps, the horses, camels, and guards were making dreadful havoc among the tulips and other flowers of the valley. The santons could not help casting piteous glances upon these ravages, while with the other eye they looked at the Caliph and the heavens. Nouronihar, enchanted with this beautiful place, which recalled the delightful solitudes of her childhood, besought Vathek to halt; but the prince, thinking that all these little oratories might appeal to the Giaour as one house, com-

manded his pioneers to rase them to the ground. The santons remained like men turned to stone while this barbarous command was being carried out. They wept hot tears, and Vathek had them driven off with kicks by his eunuchs. He and Nouronihar then alighted from their litter and together walked in the meadow, picking flowers and jesting; but the bees, which were good Mus-sulmans, thought themselves obliged to avenge the wrongs done to their dear masters, the santons, and stung the couple so furiously that they were only too glad when their tents were ready for their accommodation.

Bababalouk, who had not failed to remark the plumpness of the peacocks and turtle-doves, at once spitted some dozens of them and made fricassees of as many more. The company were laughing, drinking, and blaspheming to their hearts' content when there appeared all the mullahs, sheikhs, and cadis, all the imams of Shiraz, who had not encountered the fleeing santons. They rode on asses garlanded with flowers and caparisoned with ribbons and silver bells, and laden with everything of the best that the country could provide. They presented their offerings to the Caliph, beseeching him to honour their town and their mosques with his presence. 'Oh, I will take good care to avoid that,' said

Vathek; 'I accept your gifts, and I beg of you to leave me in peace, for I do not love to resist temptation. But since it is not fitting that such worthy men as you should return on foot, and since you seem to be rather poor cavaliers, my eunuchs will take the precaution of tying you on your asses, and above all will take care that you do not turn your backs to me, for they are fully familiar with etiquette.' Among the band were some hardy sheikhs who, thinking that Vathek was mad, said so openly. These Bababalouk took care to truss up with double bonds; and all the asses, pricked with thorns, made off at a gallop, curvetting and knocking against each other in the pleasantest way in the world. Nouronihar and her Caliph vied with each other in the enjoyment of this infamous sight, bursting into great peals of laughter when the old men and their steeds fell into a brook, and when some became lame, or lost an arm or their front teeth, or worse.

Two days were spent delightfully at Rocnabad, without any disturbance from further embassies. On the third the company set out again, and, leaving Shiraz on the right, reached a wide plain, on the far horizon of which could be descried the black mountain-tops of Istakhar.

On first beholding these mountains the Caliph and Nouronihar could not contain their transports, but leapt from their litter and gave vent to exclamations which astonished all those within earshot. 'Are we going into the radiant palaces of light?' they asked one another, 'or shall we wander in gardens more delectable than those of Sheddad?' Poor mortals! Thus did they multiply conjectures; the abysm of the secrets of the All-Powerful was hidden from them.

Meanwhile, the good genii, who were still in some small degree solicitous of Vathek's conduct, gathered in the seventh heaven, before Mahomet, and said to him: 'Merciful Prophet, stretch out your pitying arms to your Vicar, or he will surely fall into the traps which our enemies the dives have set for him: the Giaour awaits him in the abominable Palace of Subterranean Fire, and if Vathek once sets foot therein he is lost beyond redemption.' Mahomet made answer indignantly: 'He has but too well deserved to be left to his fate; yet I agree to your making one last effort to dissuade him from his enterprise.'

Thereupon a good genie suddenly appeared in the shape of a shepherd, more renowned for his piety than any dervish or santon in the land. He took up his position

on the slope of a little hill, near a flock of white sheep, and began to play on an unknown instrument, tunes whose touching melodies moved the soul, awakened remorse, and drove away all light imaginings. At such moving sounds, the sun became covered with a dark cloud, and the waters of a little lake, which had been clearer than crystal, became as red as blood. All the members of the Caliph's stately cortège were drawn in their own despite to the hill-side. Every man lowered his eyes and stood dismayed; every one reproached himself with the evil that he had done: Dilara's heart beat painfully; and the chief eunuch, with contrite mien, asked pardon of the women for having often tormented them for his own satisfaction.

Vathek and Nouronihar, in their litter, went pale and gazed at each other with haggard eyes, reproaching themselves, one with a thousand crimes of the blackest infamy, a thousand projects of impious ambition, and the other with the sorrow of her family and the loss of Gulchenrouz. Nouronihar seemed to distinguish in this fatal music the cries of her dying father, and Vathek heard the sobs of the fifty children whom he had sacrificed to the Giaour. In this anguished condition they were all constrained to draw near to the shepherd. His counten-

ance bore the mark of something so imposing that for the first time in his life Vathek was unable to look up, while Nouronihar hid her face in her hands. The music ceased, and the genie, addressing the Caliph, said: 'Foolish prince, to whom Providence has confided the care of peoples! is it thus that thou fulfillest thy mission? Thou hast reached the summit of thy crimes; dost thou now hasten to thy punishment? Thou knowest that beyond those mountains Eblis and his cursed dives hold their dreadful sway, and, beguiled by a malign phantom, thou goest to deliver thyself unto them! This moment is the last instant of grace which is granted to thee: abandon thy horrid plan, retrace thy steps, give Nouronihar back to her father, in whom the breath of life still lingers, destroy thy tower and all its abominations, banish Carathis from thy councils, be just to thy subjects, respect the Ministers of the Prophet, atone for thine impieties by an exemplary life, and, instead of spending thy days in voluptuousness, go weep for thy crimes over the tombs of thy pious ancestors! Seest thou those clouds that hide the sun from thy sight? When that orb shall reappear, if thy heart has not changed, the time of mercy for thee will have gone by for ever.'

Vathek, trembling with fright, was on the point of

prostrating himself before the shepherd, whom he well knew to be of a nature superior to man; but his pride swept him away, and, boldly throwing back his head, he darted one of his terrible glances at the shepherd. 'Whoever thou art,' said he, 'forbear to give me useless counsel. Either thou desirest to deceive me or thou art thyself deceived: if what I have done is as criminal as thou maintainest there could be no moment of grace for me. I have swum in a sea of blood in order to attain a power which will make thee and thy kind to tremble; flatter not thyself, therefore, that I will turn back when the harbour is in sight, nor that I will abandon her who is more dear to me than life and thy mercy. Let the sun reappear and light my course; what matters it where it may end!' Having spoken these words, which made even the genie tremble, Vathek threw himself into the arms of Nouronihar, and gave orders that the horses should be compelled to take the high road again.

There was no difficulty about carrying out this order, for the spell was broken, and the sun had reappeared in all his splendour, while the shepherd had disappeared with a mournful cry. Nevertheless the fatal impression of the genie's music remained in the hearts of most of Vathek's followers, and they looked at each other in

affright. That same night nearly all of them escaped, and there remained of this large cavalcade only the chief eunuch, a few idolatrous slaves, Dilara, and a small number of other women, who, like her, professed the religion of the Mages.

The Caliph, consumed with the ambition of giving laws to the powers of darkness, was but little perturbed by this desertion. The agitation of his blood prevented him from sleeping, and he no longer camped at night as usual. Nouronihar, whose impatience if possible surpassed his own, urged him to hasten his march, and, to confuse his mind, lavished a thousand tender caresses on him. She believed herself already more powerful than Balkis, and in her imagination saw the genii prostrated before her throne. They pushed forward thus by moonlight until they came in sight of two slender rocks which formed a sort of portal to a valley whose farther end was closed by the vast ruins of Istakhar. Nearly at the top of the mountain they discovered the façades of several tombs of kings, the horrid aspect of which was increased by the shades of night. The travellers passed through two almost entirely deserted villages, in which there only remained two or three feeble old men, who, seeing the horses and litters, threw themselves on their knees,

crying: 'Heavens! Are these more of such phantoms as have tormented us for six months? Alas! Our people, affrighted by these strange apparitions and by the noise which is heard beneath the mountains, have abandoned us to the tender mercies of maleficent spirits!' As these complaints seemed of bad omen to the Caliph, he and his followers rode over the poor old men's bodies, and at last arrived at the foot of the great terrace of black marble. He there alighted, with Nouronihar, from his litter. With fluttering hearts, and with glances roving over all surrounding objects, they awaited in involuntary trepidation the arrival of the Giaour; but there was still no sign of him. An ominous silence reigned on the mountain and in the surrounding air. The moon cast great shadows on the platform from the high columns which rose from the terrace almost to the clouds. These dismal beacons, in numbers almost beyond computation, supported no roof; and their capitals, of an architecture unknown in the annals of earth, served as a retreat for nocturnal birds, which, alarmed at the approach of so many people, croaking took wing.

The chief eunuch, benumbed with fear, besought Vathek to allow a fire to be lit and a meal to be taken. 'No, no,' replied the Caliph, 'the time for thinking of

that kind of thing has gone by; keep quiet and await my orders.' Thus speaking, in firm tones, he offered his hand to Nouronihar, and, mounting the steps of a vast flight, they came to the terrace, which was paved with marble flags, and like a smooth lake where no grass can grow. To the right were the columns ranged before the ruins of an immense palace, the walls of which were covered with various carvings. Opposite appeared four gigantic statues of animals which bore some resemblance to the griffin and the leopard, and were frightful in aspect. Not far from them could be descried in the moonlight (which shone with particular clearness on this place), characters like those which had been on the Giaour's sabres: they had the same property of changing every moment; and finally they became fixed as Arabic letters, and the Caliph read these words: 'Vathek, thou hast not fulfilled the conditions of my parchment; thou hast deserved to be turned away; but because of thy companion and all thou hast done to obtain her, Eblis grants that the door of his palace shall be opened to thee, and that thou shalt be numbered among the adorers of the subterranean fire.'

Scarcely had he read these words when the mountain against which the terrace was reared trembled, and the

columns seemed to collapse on their heads. The rock gaped, and disclosed in its bosom a stairway of polished marble which appeared to lead down into the abyss. On each step were placed two great torches similar to those which Nouronihar had seen in her vision, which threw out a camphor-laden vapour in a thick cloud under the vault.

This sight, instead of striking fear into Fakreddin's daughter, gave her new courage. She did not so much as deign to bid farewell to the moon and the firmament, but, without hesitation, forsook the pure air of heaven and plunged into these infernal exhalations. The two impious creatures walked with pride and confidence; and as they descended, by the brilliant light of the torches, they found each other so admirable and resplendent that they believed they had become celestial intelligences. The one thing which aroused their anxiety was that the steps did not come to an end. They hastened with keen impatience, until their pace was accelerated to such a point that they rather seemed to be falling quickly down a precipice than walking; and at last they were brought up short by a great portal of ebony which the Caliph had no difficulty in recognizing, for it was there that the Giaour awaited him, a golden key in his hand 'Welcome!

despite Mahomet and all his hosts,' said he, with a fearsome smile; 'I will now conduct you into this palace, in which you have so worthily earned a place.' Thus speaking he touched the enamelled lock with his key, and immediately the two doors opened with a noise louder than that of thunder in the dog-days, and closed with a like clangour as soon as the three had entered.

The Caliph and Nouronihar looked at each other in amazement when they found themselves in a place which, although vaulted, was so spacious and lofty that at first they took it for a great plain. As at length their eyes became accustomed to the great size of surrounding objects, and they discovered rows of columns and arcades running off in diminishing perspective until they concentrated in a radiant spot like the setting sun painting the sea with his last rays. The pavement, strewn with gold and saffron, gave forth so subtle an odour as almost to overpower them. Nevertheless they went forward, and remarked an infinite number of censers in which burned ambergris and wood of aloes. Between the columns were placed tables covered with an innumerable variety of dishes, and provided with every sort of wine, sparkling in crystal vases. A crowd of jinns and other wanton spirits of both sexes danced lasciviously

in groups, to the sound of music which resounded from below.

In the midst of this vast expanse paraded a multitude of men and women, who all kept their right hands over their hearts, preserved an absolute indifference to everything and walked in complete silence. They were all as pale as corpses, and their sunken eyes were like the phosphorescent lights which may be seen at night in graveyards. Some were plunged in profound meditation; while others, fuming with rage, ran hither and thither like tigers wounded by poisoned darts. Each avoided his fellows; and each, though he moved in the midst of a great concourse, wandered aimlessly as though he were alone.

Seeing this fearful company, Vathek and Nouronihar felt frozen with fright. They roughly demanded of the Giaour what all this meant, and why all these perambulating spectres never removed their right hands from their hearts. 'Trouble not yourselves with so many things at the present moment,' he answered, brusquely, 'you will know all soon enough; let us make haste to present ourselves before Eblis.' So they continued their way through all this concourse; yet despite their early assurance they had not enough courage to pay any attention

to the chambers and galleries which opened out to the right and the left: these were all lighted with flaming torches and with braziers from which the flames rose in a pyramid to the centre of the vault. The three arrived at last in a place where long curtains of crimson and gold brocade hung all around in stately confusion. There neither the music nor the dance could be heard; and such light as penetrated seemed to come from far off.

Vathek and Nouronihar pushed aside these hangings and entered a vast tabernacle carpeted with leopard-skins. An infinite number of long-bearded old men and afrites in full armour lay prostrate before the steps of a dais, on which, seated on a globe of fire, appeared the terrible Eblis. His countenance was that of a young man of twenty years whose noble and regular features seemed to have been blemished by malignant vapours. Despair and pride were reflected in his large eyes, and something of the character of an angel of light still clung to his flowing tresses. His delicate hand, blackened by thunderbolts, grasped the brazen sceptre which can strike terror into the monster Ouranbad, the afrites, and all the powers of the pit.

At this sight the Caliph was abashed and prostrated himself with his face to the earth. Nouronihar, distraught



though she was, could not prevent herself from admiring the form of Eblis, for she had expected to see some frightful giant. Eblis, speaking to them in a milder voice than could have been imagined possible, yet betraying the deep melancholy of his soul, said: 'Creatures of clay, I receive you into my empire and number you among my adorers. Enjoy all that this palace offers to your gaze, the treasures of the pre-Adamite sultans, their thunderstriking sabres, and the talismans which will force the dives to open to you the depths of the Mountain of Kaf, which communicate with these. There you will find the wherewithal to assuage your insatiable curiosity. It shall be for you alone to penetrate into the fortress of Aherman and the halls of Argenk, where are painted all reasoning creatures, and all the animals which inhabited the earth before the creation of that contemptible being whom you call the father of mankind.'

Vathek and Nouronihar felt consoled and reassured by this harangue, and said eagerly to the Giaour: 'Lead us quickly to the place where these precious talismans are to be found.' 'Come,' replied the wicked dive, with his treacherous grimace; 'Come, you shall possess all that our Master promises you, and much more besides.' He then led them through a long passage leading out of the

tabernacle, walking in front with great strides and followed joyfully by his hapless disciples. They came to a spacious hall roofed with a very high dome, and in the walls were to be seen fifty bronze doors secured with clasps of steel. Here a funereal darkness reigned, and all around, on couches of incorruptible cedar, rested the fleshless forms of the famous pre-Adamite kings, formerly monarchs holding sway over all the earth. They had still enough life in them to be aware of their deplorable state; their eyes still rolled sadly; they gazed languidly at each other, and all kept their right hands over their hearts. At their feet could be seen inscriptions recounting the events of their reigns, their power, their pride, and their crimes. Suleiman Raad, Suleiman Daki, and Suleiman called Gian Ben Gian, who, after having enchained the dives in the sombre caverns of Kaf, became so presumptuous that they doubted the Supreme Power, there held a conspicuous place; but a rank not comparable with that of the prophet, Suleiman Ben Daoud.

This king, so famous for his wisdom, was set upon the highest pedestal, immediately beneath the dome. He seemed to have more life in him than the others; and though from time to time he gave vent to deep sighs and held his right hand over his heart like his com-

panions, his countenance was more serene; and he seemed to be listening to the noise of a cataract of black water which could be dimly made out through one of the doors, which was formed of bars. No other sound disturbed the silence of this mournful place. A line of brazen vases surrounded the pedestal. 'Remove the covers from these cabalistic receptacles,' said the Giaour to Vathek; 'take the talismans which will break open all these doors of bronze and will make thee master of the treasures which they hide and of the spirits which watch over them.'

The Caliph, who had been quite intimidated by this sinister place, tremblingly drew near to the vases, and thought he would die of terror when he heard the groans of Suleiman, whom in his troubled state he had taken for a corpse. Then a voice issuing from the prophet's livid mouth pronounced these words: 'During my lifetime I held a magnificent throne. At my right hand were set twelve thousand golden seats, where the patriarchs and prophets gave ear to my teaching. At my left the sages and the doctors, seated on as many thrones of silver, witnessed my judgments. While I thus gave justice to innumerable multitudes the birds ceaselessly hovering above my head formed a canopy against the heat of the sun. My people flourished; my palaces rose

to the clouds: I built a temple to the Most High, a temple which was the wonder of the universe. But I basely let myself be led astray by the love of women, and by a curiosity which did not limit itself to sublunary things. I listened to the counsels of Aherman, and of Pharaoh's daughter; I worshipped fire and the stars; and, forsaking the holy city, I commanded the genii to build the superb palaces of Istakhar and the terrace of the beacons, of which each one was dedicated to a star. There, for a while, I enjoyed to the full the splendour of the throne and of voluptuousness: not only men, but the genii also were subject to me. I then, like the unhappy monarchs who surround me, began to believe that the celestial vengeance slept, when suddenly a thunderbolt destroyed my palaces and hurled me down to this place. However, unlike all others who dwell here, I am not altogether deprived of hope. An angel of light has made known to me that in consideration of the piety of my younger years my torments shall end when this cataract (the drops of which I count) shall run dry. But alas! when will that longed-for time arrive? I am in dreadful torment, for a pitiless fire feeds on my heart.'

Saying these words, Suleiman lifted his hands towards the heavens in token of supplication, and the Caliph saw

that his bosom was of transparent crystal, through which could be seen his heart consumed in flames. At this terrible sight Nouronihar fell back like one petrified, into Vathek's arms. 'Oh, Giaour!' cried that unhappy prince; 'into what place hast thou brought us? Let us go from hence; I release thee from all thy promises. Oh, Mahomet! is there no more mercy for us?' 'Nay, there is no more mercy,' replied the malevolent dive; 'know that this is the domain of vengeance and despair; thy heart shall glow with fire like that of all the worshippers of Eblis. A few days are given thee before the fatal decree is made good. Employ them as thou wilt; lie upon the piles of gold and command the infernal powers; wander through all these immense domains at will; no door shall be closed to thee. As for me, I have fulfilled my mission, and I leave thee to thyself.' Having pronounced these words, he disappeared.

The Caliph and Nouronihar remained in mortal dejection; their tears would not flow, and scarcely could they sustain themselves. At last they sadly linked hand in hand and tremblingly walked out of this fearsome apartment, not knowing whither they went. Every door opened at their approach, the dives prostrated themselves before them, and hoards of riches were displayed

before their gaze; but they had no longer curiosity nor pride nor avarice. They treated with equal indifference the choirs of jinns and the superb banquets which were everywhere set out. They wandered from chamber to chamber, from hall to hall, from corridor to corridor, finding every place boundless, all lighted by a melancholy radiance, all furnished with the same sad magnificence, all full of souls seeking rest and solace—but seeking in vain, for they all bore everywhere a heart consumed in flames. Avoided by all these wretches, whose looks seemed to accuse each other of being the cause of sin and corruption, they kept apart and awaited in fearful anguish the moment when they too should become like these terrible people.

‘What!’ said Nouronihar, ‘will the time come when I shall withdraw my hand from thine?’ ‘Ah!’ said Vathek, ‘shall my eyes ever cease from drawing great draughts of the voluptuousness in thine? Shall the sweet moments we have spent together become for me a memory of horror? No, it is not thou who hast led me into this hateful place; it is the impious principles by which Carathis perverted my youth that have caused both my downfall and thine: oh that at least she might suffer with us!’ Having pronounced these mournful words he sum-

moned an afrite who was stoking up a brazier, and commanded him to carry off the Princess Carathis from the Palace of Samarah and bring her to him.

Having given this order, the Caliph and Nouronihar continued to walk among the silent assembly until they heard voices at the end of a gallery. Presuming that these proceeded from wretches who, like themselves, had not yet received the final stroke of doom, they followed the sounds of the voices and found that they issued from a little square chamber, where, seated on sofas, were four young men of noble aspect and a beautiful woman, sadly holding colloquy by the light of a lamp. They were all gloomy and dejected, and two of them were embracing with much feeling. On the entry of the Caliph and Fakreddin's daughter they rose civilly, greeted the newcomers, and made room for them. Then the man who appeared the most distinguished of the company addressed himself to the Caliph thus: 'Stranger, you are doubtless in the same horrible suspense as we are, since you do not yet hold your right hand over your heart. If you have come to spend with us the ghastly moments which must roll by before we meet our common punishment, deign to recount to us the adventures which have brought you to this fatal place, and we will

tell you ours, which are only too well worthy to be heard. To relate one's crimes, though it be too late to repent of them, is the only suitable occupation for such wretches as we.'

The Caliph and Nouronihar agreed to this suggestion, and Vathek, not without many a groan, gave them a sincere account of everything that had happened to him. When he had finished his painful narration the young man who had spoken to him began his own story as follows.

[Story of the two friends, Princes Alasi and Firouz, shut up in the Palace of Subterranean Fire.

Story of Prince Barkiarokh, shut up in the Palace of Subterranean Fire.

Story of Prince Kalilah and Princess Zulkais, shut up in the Palace of Subterranean Fire.]

The third prince was in the middle of his story when he was interrupted by a noise which caused the vault to tremble and gape. Soon afterwards, amid a gradually dissipating exhalation, Carathis appeared on the back of the afrite, who complained horribly of his burden. She leapt to earth, and approaching her son, said: 'Why art thou in this small chamber? Seeing that the dives obey thee, I thought that thou wert established on the throne of the pre-Adamite kings.'

‘Execrable woman!’ replied the Caliph, ‘accursed be the day on which thou hast brought me into the world. Go, follow thine afrite, and let him lead thee into the hall of the prophet Suleiman; and there thou shalt learn the purpose of this palace which has appeared to thee so desirable, and how much I must abhor the impious counsels thou hast given me!’ ‘Has the power to which thou hast attained confused thy brain?’ replied Carathis. ‘I ask for nothing better than to pay homage to the prophet Suleiman. Thou must know, however, that, having been told by the afrite that neither thou nor I should ever return to Samarah, I begged him to allow me to put my affairs in order, and he was good enough to consent to this. I did not fail to profit by these few moments; I set fire to the tower, burning alive the mutes, the negresses, the torpedoes, and the serpents, which however had rendered me many services; and I would have done as much for the Grand Vizier if he had not abandoned me for Motavekel. As for Bababalouk, who had been fool enough to return to Samarah and very kindly find husbands for thy women, I should have put him to the torture if I had had time; but as I was in a hurry I contented myself with having him arrested, after entrapping him into my presence, and the women as

well; and I had them all buried alive by my negresses, who thus employed their last moments to their great satisfaction. As for Dilara, who always pleased me, she has shown her spirit by taking service with a Mage near here, and I think that she will soon be one of us.' Vathek was too distraught to express the indignation which this speech caused him. He commanded the afrite to take Carathis out of his presence, and remained sunk in a mournful reverie which his companions dared not disturb.

Meanwhile Carathis brusquely penetrated as far as the dome of Suleiman, and without paying the least attention to the prophet's sighs she boldly removed the covers from the vases and took possession of the talismans. Then, raising such a shout as had never before been heard in this fearsome empire, she compelled the dives to show her the most carefully hidden treasures and the most mysterious grottos which the afrite himself had never seen. She passed by rapid descents which were known only to Eblis and to the most powerful of his favourites, and by means of the talismans penetrated into the bowels of the earth, whence blows the Sansar, a wind chilled by death. Nothing struck terror into her indomitable heart. However, she found in all those who

held their hands over their hearts a little peculiarity which did not please her.

As she was issuing from one of these abysses, Eblis appeared before her. But despite all his imposing majesty she did not lose countenance, and even paid her respects with much self-possession. The superb Monarch answered her: 'Princess, whose knowledge and whose crimes have merited a high place in my empire, you do well to employ the leisure which remains to you; for the flames and torments which will soon take hold on your heart will give you occupation enough.' Having said these words, he disappeared within the draperies of his tabernacle.

Carathis was somewhat abashed; but, resolved to persevere to the bitter end and carry out the advice of Eblis, she assembled all the choirs of jinns and all the dives, to receive their homage. She marched thus in triumph through a mist of perfumes to the acclamations of all the malignant spirits, the greater number of which she already knew. She was even about to dethrone one of the Suleimans in order to take his place, when a voice issuing from the abyss of death cried: 'All is accomplished!' Immediately the proud forehead of the intrepid Princess was seamed with lines of agony; she gave vent to a piercing cry, and her heart became an ardent

brazier. She raised her hand to cover it, never more to take it away.

In this state of frenzy, forgetting her ambitious projects and her thirsting after knowledge which must remain hidden from mortals, she overturned the offerings which the jinns had deposited at her feet; and cursing the hour of her birth and the bosom which had nurtured her, she began to run, never more to stop or know a moment's repose.

Almost at the same time the same voice had announced to the Caliph and Nouronihar, to the four princes and the princess, the irrevocable decree. Their hearts had burst into flames, and it was then that they lost the most precious of the gifts of Heaven, *hope*! These unhappy creatures had recoiled from each other with looks of fury. Vathek no longer saw in Nouronihar's glance anything but rage and vengeance; and she read in his eyes nothing but aversion and despair. The two princes who had been friends, who, up to that moment, had been tenderly clasped together in an embrace, started away from each other trembling. Kalilah and his sister each made at the other a gesture of imprecation. All of them, by their frightful contortions and smothered cries, bore witness to the horror which they had for themselves; all

plunged into the accursed crowd, to wander there in an eternity of torture.

Such was, and such should be, the punishment of unbridled passions and atrocious deeds; such will be the guerdon of blind curiosity which desires to penetrate beyond the bounds which the Creator has placed to human knowledge; of ambition which, wishing to acquire sciences reserved for purer intelligences, gains only an insensate pride, and does not perceive that the lot of man is to be humble and ignorant.

Thus the Caliph Vathek, who in order to attain a vain splendour and a forbidden power had sullied himself with a thousand crimes, became the prey of remorse and of pain without end or limit; while the humble and despised Gulchenrouz passed the centuries in sweet tranquillity and the happiness of childhood.

TEXTUAL NOTE

P. 26, l. 5. *gloom*. In the original this sentence runs: *il a nettoyé mon cœur d'une partie du surmé qui l'envelopoit* (1815 ed., p. 18). This word, *surmé* (which has been passed over without remark by all previous editors), is unknown to the best French lexicographers, and has caused me considerable mystification. Henley renders it as 'perplexity', which fits the context well enough, but I have been at pains to find out the exact meaning of a word which does not appear in Littré or in Hatzfeld & Darmesteter. Mr. Lytton Strachey very kindly pointed out that on pp. 234-5 of the first English edition Henley has a note on a passage on p. 65—*painting the eyes of the Circassians*—which reads: 'It was an ancient custom in the East, and still continues, to tinge the eyes of women, particularly those of a fair complexion, with an impalpable powder, prepared chiefly from crude antimony, and called *surmeh*.' The similarity in spelling between the two words was striking, but on the face of it there seemed to be no semantic connexion between them; and moreover, the French translation of Henley's note, in the Paris edition, renders the passage: 'une poudre impalpable appelée *formé*.' Since the earlier passage, in both the Lausanne and the Paris editions, reads *surmé*, why should Beckford (if it was he who translated Henley's notes) translate *surmeh* by *formé*? However, the spelling *surmé*, in Sachs und Villatte's *Enzyklopädisches französisch-deutsches und deutsch-französisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin, 1907), is given thus:

surmé -éh || -et || *s/m.* wohlriechendes Mittel, womit die Perserinnen sich die Augenlider einreiben.

which is a good piece of evidence that *surmé* and *surmeh* are the same thing. *Sormé* I can nowhere trace, and I take the 'o' to be a misprint for 'u'.

Through the good offices of my friend Mr. Douglas Hamer, formerly Professor of English in the Aligarh Muslim University, India, I have been able to obtain the opinion of Syed Hadi Hasan, Professor of Persian in the same University. Mr. Hadi Hasan writes thus:

'The word in the original is . . . transcribed *surmá* or *surmé*, but more correctly *surmeh*. It means a black powder of lead and antimony, used for painting the eyes—in other words a collyrium. I have no doubt whatsoever that the Caliph Wāthiq (or Wāṣiq), in saying that "this man has cleansed my heart of the *surmeh* which enveloped it" is using the word *surmeh* in a figurative or poetical sense, meaning: "this man has cleansed my heart of the blackness (or darkness) which enveloped it."

'This sort of language . . . might appear to Western ears as grotesque, but the thing is so common to Easterners that when I read your letter for the first time I was surprised that you should have felt any difficulty at all in interpreting the passage. *Surmeh*, in the passage cited by you, does not mean "anxiety" or "grief": it just means this black collyrium used for the eyes. And the transference of this collyrium from the eyes to the heart, and from a paint to anxiety, all arises from the context. A Westerner, knowing that *surmeh* was a collyrium and an adornment, would never have given such a construction: "he has cleansed my heart of *surmeh*". But when an Easterner says it, he simply uses *surmeh* here, not as a black paint for the eyes, but as *blackness*. I therefore have no hesitation at all in saying that you will be perfectly correct in translating the word *surmeh* in the passage cited as "blackness", and adding a foot-note that the word is being used figuratively—a sort of thing which is of ordinary occurrence in Oriental literature . . .

'P.S. I think you had better transcribe the Caliph's name (spelt by you as Vathek) as Wāṣiq or Wāthiq . . .'

This is conclusive. I have treated the matter at length, because Beckford's use of this word (in the light of Mr. Hadi Hasan's letter) is extremely interesting as a proof of how thoroughly he had steeped himself in Oriental literature. Evidently he had not only assimilated its spirit, but was capable, on occasion, of falling quite naturally into its idiom.

My best thanks are due to Mr. Hadi Hasan, and to Mr. Lytton Strachey, who first suggested that *surmé* might be a figurative use of *surmeh*.

H. B. G.



THIS EDITION CONSISTS OF 1050 COPIES
FOR SALE IN ENGLAND BY THE NONESUCH
PRESS AND 500 COPIES FOR SALE IN THE
UNITED STATES BY RANDOM HOUSE INC.
THE TEXT HAS BEEN PRINTED BY JOHN
JOHNSON, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY, AT
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, OXFORD; THE
ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE CURWEN PRESS,
LONDON. THIS IS NUMBER 738







